

NORMAN'S NUGGET



J. MACDONALD OXLEY B.A.

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NORMAN'S NUGGET.



"HE CLAPPED SPURS TO HIS HORSE AND FOLLOWED THE TERROR."

NORMAN'S NUGGET.

BY

J. MACDONALD OXLEY, B.A.,

AUTHOR OF

"ARCHIE MACKENZIE," "NORTH OVERLAND WITH
FRANKLIN," ETC., ETC.

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DEDICATORY NOTE.

TO SIR WILLIAM C. VAN HORNE, K.C.M.G.

I FEEL that I should be guilty not only of base ingratitude, but of gross injustice to you, were I not to acknowledge, by way of this dedication, the assistance so kindly given in the preparation of my story. Your intimate personal knowledge of the *locale*, your familiarity with its history and people, and your felicitous suggestions as to plot and treatment, have helped me more than I find myself able to fittingly testify.

J. MACDONALD OXLEY.

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NORMAN'S NUGGET.

CHAPTER I.

GETTING UNDER WAY.¹

AMONG the Argonauts of '49 who, after exhausting their luck in the gold-fields, settled down to retrieve their fortunes by the slower, albeit surer, process of ranching, was John Thompson, erstwhile of Loamshire, England, but ultimately of Walla Walla, on the Pacific Slope.

As soon as he gave up the adventurous life of the miner, with its many vicissitudes, and established himself on the ranch, he had sent for his family, who gladly rejoined him after the long, weary years of separation.

Three boys and two girls, all of them ruddy,

¹ The author wishes to express his special obligations to Mr. Byron Johnston's vivacious record of personal experience, "Very Far West Indeed."

sturdy, and full of energy, composed John Thompson's quiverful, and there were no fonder nor prouder parents in all the country than he and his good wife, who was the very type of the substantial British mother.

Matters went very well at the Thompson ranch for several years, and then a calamity befell the happy homestead that plunged it into sorrow.

Mr. Thompson, while returning after night-fall from a distant part of the ranch, was caught in one of those terrible thunderstorms not infrequent in that region. He happened to be riding a young and high-spirited horse, not long broken to the saddle, and the creature, being panic-stricken at the thunder and lightning, bolted madly through the darkness.

For a mile or more it darted blindly across the country until it came to a deep ravine, into which it plunged headlong, with the lamentable result that both horse and rider were found the following morning lying side by side in death.

When this happened, John, the eldest son, who had been his father's lieutenant on the ranch, was just of age; Henry, the second boy, two years younger, was a clerk in a

store at Walla Walla, and promising to do well; while Norman, the youngest, well on in his teens, helped about the ranch, although he had no idea of sticking to it for life.

The fact was, that he seemed to have inherited all that was adventurous in his father's nature.

John and Henry were steady-going fellows, true sons of staid John Bull in their attention to business, and it was easy to predict for them solid, if not brilliant, success in life.

But Norman was no less a chip of the old block, only that he belonged to the same type as did Drake, and Cook, and Livingstone. He was a born knight-errant, and only waited the chance to set out upon his quest.

John Thompson, once the gold-fever cooled in his veins, had proved a thrifty, prudent man, and left his affairs in such a shape that it was not difficult for John junior, with the aid of his mother's shrewd counsel, to take hold and carry on the ranch to advantage.

There was, therefore, no cause for concern as to the maintenance of the mother and the two girls, so that if Norman could make his own way he had no special responsibilities to bind him to the ranch, where they could manage very well without him.

Such was the state of affairs when, in the year 1858, the excitement aroused by the gold discoveries on the Fraser River, in British Columbia, spread over California, Oregon, and Washington territory, stripping ships of their crews in San Francisco Harbour, emptying stores and shops of their clerks, tempting lawyers and doctors from their offices and farmers from their fields, and also drawing to the Canadian province by the Pacific much of the riff-raff and human scum from the coast cities, that rejoiced at the riddance.

Walla Walla, though far inland, was not exempt from the epidemic. The possibility of finding fortunes in a few months upon the wonderful gold-bars of the Fraser River became the one absorbing topic here, and when Norman paid his brother in the store a visit, he would remain for hours listening in absorbed silence to the animated talk of the men as they exchanged experiences of '49, or projected and planned expeditions into the new Eldorado.

Norman's blood was set on fire by what he thus heard, and it became the supreme desire of his life to join one of these expeditions and share its fortunes.

But how was this to be accomplished?

Each man who went had, of course, to provide his own outfit, and also to contribute towards the general expenses for waggons, horses, and so forth.

In fact, only those with a certain amount of capital could expect to find a place in the parties that were being organised.

Yet Norman, with the splendid hopefulness of a boy, did not by any means despair of having his own way.

He was not really needed at the ranch, and no other opening for his energy was in view, so that if he could try his luck at gold-hunting it would not be altogether lost time, anyway.

One day, when he was lounging in the store, chatting with his brother and listening to the talk of the men, for whom it was the favourite rendezvous, his interest was excited by a conversation between the storekeeper, Joe Dudley, and one of his customers.

"Most ready to start, Andy?" Dudley inquired, as he got out what the other had asked for. "You're goin' with Maclellan, ain't you?"

"Just about, Joe," replied the one questioned, who was Andy Smith, a rancher in the neighbourhood, upon whom the gold-fever had taken such hold that he had sold off

everything in order to outfit for the Fraser fields. "But I'm short of a good teamster. I want a fellow that thoroughly understands horses and knows how to look after them, and that sort of a chap isn't easy to find just now."

Norman's heart gave a great bound on hearing this.

If there was one thing more than another upon which he prided himself it was his management of horses. He could ride anything on hoofs, he believed, and certainly had proved more than a match for the worst bucking broncho on the ranch.

Not only could he ride horses, but he could handle them so as to get the best out of them.

Unless they were incurably vicious they soon grew to love him, and at the ranch most of the animals would follow him as if they were dogs.

If Andy Smith wanted a teamster with some better qualifications than the ability to swear copiously, strike hard, and kick brutally, Norman thought he could fill the place.

But he had not the courage to offer himself, fearing that to do so would only excite the

derision of the men, who were prone to regard all boys as of no account.

Yet he kept his eyes and ears alert, and presently became aware that the storekeeper was saying something about him to Smith, who, with an expression of incredulity on his face, said in an audible tone :

“ That youngster ! Why, what does he know about teaming and looking after horses ? ”

Whereupon Dudley turned around and called to Norman :

“ Come here, Norman, and answer Mr. Smith’s questions yourself.”

Conscious of growing very red in the face, and feeling rather uncomfortable at being thus challenged, Norman went forward slowly and stood before the two men.

“ Are you used to horses, my boy ? ” asked Smith, looking him over as though he were a horse himself, whose good and bad points were to be scrutinised.

“ Pretty much, sir,” replied Norman, growing more at ease as he became used to the situation.

“ Have you done any teaming ? ” was the next query.

“ A little, sir,” was the response.

As a matter of fact, Norman had done

a great deal for his age, the whole of that work required at the ranch having fallen to him since his father's death.

"Would you take a job in that line if you could get it?" Smith inquired, fixing upon him his keen, dark eyes.

"I guess I would," replied Norman, who had now thoroughly regained his self-possession, and who returned his questioner's look with one no less direct.

"Suppose you show what you can do, then," returned Smith, "and I may give you a chance."

It was accordingly arranged that that afternoon Mr. Smith should bring his team to the store, where Norman would meet him and exhibit his skill as a teamster.

When the time appointed came, the usual group of loungers at Dudley's was recruited by many more who had heard of the forthcoming test of Norman's skill, and were eager to witness it.

Andy Smith's team was well known to be a troublesome one to manage, and that was the very reason he had had difficulty in securing a satisfactory driver for it.

About three o'clock he drove up, looking very well pleased with himself as he sent his

long whip cracking over the backs of his horses, making them plunge and rear while he held them back with the taut reins.

Swinging the heavy waggon round with a grand sweep before the store, he brought it to a stop, and called out :

“ Is Norman Thompson there ? ”

Norman was on hand all ready for the trial, and, giving up his place to him, Smith said :

“ Now then, youngster, let's see what you can do with them. They're anything but lambs, I can tell you. Just take them along the road a piece, and see if you can make them all work together in good shape.”

Feeling more nervous than he had ever done in his life before, but none the less determined to acquit himself with credit, Norman sprang into the seat, grasped the reins, and called upon the team to start.

But they did nothing of the kind. Startled by the strange voice, they began to back instead of going ahead, and to crowd against one another so as to look ominously like doing some damage.

At this the spectators laughed, and volunteered bits of advice, such as :

“ Give them the whip ! ” “ Yell to them, Norman ! ” and so on ; while Andy Smith,

growing anxious lest there should be a smash up, made as though he would get back to his place on the waggon seat.

But Norman was not a bit disconcerted.

He had had horses act just like this before, and Smith's four blacks, ugly as they seemed inclined to behave, did not daunt him in the least.

Standing up, he sent the long lash writhing over their backs, and at the same time uttered a shrill, piercing cry that had even more effect than the whip.

Almost together they reared in the air, and then the instant their hoofs touched the ground set off at a gallop, whisking the heavy waggon along as though it had been a light carriage.

The crowd of spectators gave a hearty cheer, but the owner of the outfit looked anxious.

The boy had got the team started. Would he be able to control them, or would they run away with him?

Had he been a classical scholar, the instance of the ill-starred Phaeton would no doubt have come to his mind.

But he knew nothing of the lore of Lemprière, and thought only of his highly prized animals, now careering over the road

amid a great cloud of dust, which presently altogether hid them from sight.

"The young fellow has grit, eh, Andy?" remarked Dudley, looking well pleased at the way things were going, for he took quite an interest in Norman.

"A pretty good stock of it," answered Smith rather grimly, for he was still in doubt as to the result of the trial. "Is he strong enough to handle them critters, think you?"

"Don't you worry," responded the store-keeper, "he'll bring them back here inside of ten minutes just as meek as sheep."

Nor was Dudley's confidence misplaced.

Before the ten minutes had elapsed the team reappeared, coming along as steadily as a mail coach, Norman sitting at ease on the seat and talking to the horses in a quiet, friendly way.

When within a hundred yards of the store, in front of which was a large open space, he gathered up the reins, chirruped to the horses, and set them at a gallop, swinging round in a wide curve and pulling them up in front of the store in fine style.

"Bravo! bravo!" "Tip-top, my boy!" and other admiring exclamations greeted this

clever bit of driving, and even Andy Smith's hard features had something like a smile on them as he said :

"Not so bad, young 'un. Now let me see you unhitch them, and then hitch them in again."

By this time the horses had come to recognise they were in the hands of one who understood them, and they gave no trouble whatever while Norman unharnessed them, and afterwards put them back.

"I reckon you'll do," was all Smith said, when this had been done satisfactorily. "I'll have a talk with you to-morrow."

Proud of his success as a teamster, and exulting in the prospect of thus finding a place in the party soon to start for the gold-fields, Norman hurried home to tell his mother all about it.

Naturally enough she shrank from the idea of his making such a venture, and would have been glad to dissuade him from it had she been able.

But that was out of the question. His heart was set upon going. There was really nothing to detain him at home, and it would only make him wretchedly unhappy and discontented if he were crossed in his purpose.

So at last, with many tears, she gave her assent, and it only remained for terms to be settled with Andy Smith.

Now Norman was so consumed with eagerness to join the expedition that he was ready to accept anything Smith might offer him.

But John, his eldest brother, had a cooler head, and he thought it well to go along with Norman when the terms were to be arranged.

Andy Smith had the reputation of being a "near" man, and the way he acted on this occasion showed how well he deserved it.

Rightly judging that Norman was more anxious to get to the gold-fields than to earn big wages, he at first pretended to think that taking the young fellow along with him and finding his "grub stake" for him ought to be sufficient return for his work as teamster.

But John would not listen to this. "Not by a long chalk, Mr. Smith," he said, with a decision that Smith realised was immovable. "I'll see that Normie has a right good outfit, and he'll take along his own grub stake if you like, but you must give him fair pay for his work, or a share in your luck with the gold."

Smith caught at the last words. It would certainly be better for him to agree to give Norman a share in his luck than to bind himself to any definite wages, for then, if he did make a good strike, he could easily spare something, or manage somehow to evade paying up; and if he didn't then he would have had Norman's assistance for practically nothing.

With well-assumed reluctance, however, for he was at heart a selfish, unprincipled schemer, who proposed to use Norman just to suit his own plans, and with entire indifference to the boy's interests, he, after some further chaffering, agreed that Norman should be found in provisions by him, and should have one-fifth of whatever good fortune befell him.

This satisfied Norman entirely; while John, who saw through Smith pretty clearly, and resolved to ask the leader of the party to have an eye to the boy and see that he got fair play, felt that the arrangement was the best that could be secured.

The expedition was being organised by Daniel Maclellan, and the time set for the rendezvous at Walla Walla was the month of May, 1858.

To the little far-west city came men from Oregon, California, and even from states farther distant, and by the middle of the month over one hundred and fifty of them had there gathered, with the common purpose of seeking their fortunes on the river-bars of British Columbia.

Daniel Maclellan was a splendid specimen of a man. He stood not less than six feet four in his stockings, with back and shoulders like a wall, was as straight and yet as lithe as an Indian, had a frank, fearless, handsome countenance tanned to a deep brown tint by constant exposure to sun and wind, and in spite of his vast strength was a merry, good-tempered fellow, utterly free from any disposition to bully other folks.

The moment Norman saw him he became his abject admirer, and the thought of his heart was :

“ Oh, how I wish I was to work for Mr. Maclellan instead of for Mr. Smith ! ”

But of course that could not be, so he had to content himself with the hope that he might somehow win Maclellan's favour, and possibly friendship.

While they were waiting for the party to be made up, the men used to amuse themselves

with feats of strength and exhibitions of skill with rifle and revolver.

One feat that Maclellan performed surprised all the others, and many a man got an inglorious tumble in trying to emulate it.

While going at full gallop on his great grey horse, as magnificent an animal as he was a man, he stretched down from the saddle, and with one arm lifted from the ground to the horse's shoulder a large, heavy sheep.

Just before the party was ready to start a trader arrived at Walla Walla from Colville, near the border-line, with the unpleasant information that the Indians on the other side of the boundary were in a hostile attitude, owing to their belief that the gold-seekers were coming to dispossess them of their territory.

He advised, therefore, that the expedition should have a thorough military organisation, to which good counsel Maclellan readily listened.

When the time for parting with Norman's family came, there were many tears shed at the Thompson ranch.

Up to then Mrs. Thompson had been very brave, giving her attention to preparing Norman's outfit, and not allowing her thoughts to dwell on the perils of the expedition and the possibility of her son never returning.

But at the last her feelings refused to be kept under control, and it seemed as if she could not let her son go.

The tears were flowing from his own eyes, and his voice was so broken as to be scarce intelligible, as he tore himself away, saying :

“ Keep up your heart, mother ! I’ll come back to you all right, and I’ll bring a big fortune with me, see if I don’t.”

CHAPTER II.

TACKLING THE "TERROR."

MACLELLAN'S company was certainly, as to size and equipment, well calculated to command respect.

It comprised one hundred and sixty men, who had some three hundred and fifty horses and mules to draw their waggons or carry their packs.

Every man had his revolver, and, in addition, there were a hundred rifles in the party.

Acting under the Colville trader's advice, four divisions were formed, Maclellan taking command of the first and leading the way.

Andy Smith was with him. He had a large waggon of the "prairie schooner" kind, and six horses, four being for the waggon and two for the saddle.

His outfit compared favourably with any one's except Maclellan's, who had two waggons and twelve horses, as he was taking up a quantity of goods for trading purposes.

Smith was deeply jealous of Maclellan. He grudged him his leadership, and had it in his heart to wrest it from him if the chance occurred, but he was too shrewd not to understand that, for the present, he must fall in with whatever plans the majority of the company might see fit to adopt.

There was not a happier boy in the land than Norman Thompson as, amid clouds of dust, the imposing cavalcade drew out of Walla Walla and turned northward.

His employer had assigned the poorest horse of the six for his mount, but that did not trouble him.

It was a steady, serviceable animal, not much to look at, but pretty good to go, and he was resolved to treat it well, and make it love him, as did the horses at the ranch.

Thanks to the loving care of his mother and brothers, there was nothing lacking in his outfit.

He had a good supply of clothing, a rifle, a revolver, and a hunting-knife, and a sufficient stock of ammunition to last him six months if he did not waste it.

"I hope you'll not have to use your arms against anything worse than bears or mountain lions, Normie," said his eldest brother, whose

gift they were ; "but, if you have to, I guess you'll find they're all right."

Norman thought so too, as he handled them lovingly. He was a good shot with both rifle and revolver, and had no doubt but he would do his part if prowling Indians should venture to attack the party.

For many days the big company pushed on northward, meeting with no other difficulties than such as were incident to getting their heavy waggons across a roadless country in which streams had to be forded, and hills to be climbed or circumvented.

Norman enjoyed the life thoroughly. It just suited his adventurous nature, which could never be content under the restraints of ordinary routine existence.

He had plenty of hard work, for Andy Smith did not spare him, throwing upon him the whole burden of caring for the teams, and making him do most of the driving, while he himself went about visiting other waggons, or riding off in search of game.

But Norman did not mind. He was so fond of horses that it was a pleasure to look after them, and he soon won the hearts of his charges, so that they gave him little trouble.

Then there were always breathing spells of rest, when even so hard a master as his could not impose any task upon him, and he was free to seek his own amusement.

Such were the long evenings after the animals had been watered and turned loose to graze, and supper had been cooked and eaten.

He could do what he liked then, and he took the opportunity of enlarging his acquaintance with the other members of the party.

He made friends quickly, for he had a bright, taking way, and was withal a rather handsome young fellow.

He had not long passed his sixteenth year, but looked more like twenty, being tall, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, and having well-tanned features that bore the unmistakable stamp of resolution and courage.

He soon found that the best passport to the favour of the rude and hardy, though good-hearted, men who mainly composed the company was to make a good showing in the feats of strength or endurance that were the chief amusement of their leisure, and so he threw himself heartily into the race-running, wrestling, horse-jockeying, target-shooting, and other sports in vogue.

In these he held his own very creditably.

He was not precisely an Admirable Crichton. He did not by any means excel in everything. But he ran fast, wrestled strongly, hit the mark with rifle or revolver twice out of three times, and rode a horse as well as any one of the party.

It was through the last accomplishment that he attracted the attention of Maclellan, the leader of the party. Maclellan, who was a notable horseman himself, had brought along with him a grey stallion that would allow no one but his owner upon his back.

Indeed, so wicked was his temper that it was always prudent to give the creature a wide berth, for he had a nasty trick of using his powerful teeth upon unwary passers-by.

One evening, while a group of the men were talking "horse," Maclellan had much to say about his grey stallion, to which he had given the appropriate name of the "Terror," by way of a grim joke.

"He isn't just as kind as he might be," he said, with a significant smile; "but he's a beauty to ride, and he lets me do anything I like with him."

"What makes him act so ugly, any way?" asked one of the group. "Think he's been badly used by anybody?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Maclellan; "I guess not. It's just his nature. I showed him he couldn't have his own way with me at the start out, and he's given me no trouble since."

"Did any one else ever back him since you got him?" inquired Andy Smith, in a tone that brought forth the retort:

"No; would you like to have a try at it?" Whereat a laugh went around the circle that brought a perceptible flush to Smith's hard features.

"Not just now," he responded slowly, "I'm a little past the time for that kind of fun. But I was thinking I had a lad looking after my team that your stallion couldn't shake off in a hurry."

"I'll give him ten dollars if he can stay on the Terror two minutes," cried Maclellan, shoving his hand into his pocket and pulling out a fat wallet.

"I guess they're as good as lost to you," answered Smith, in his curt, deliberate fashion.

It was then growing dark, and too late to do anything more, but the following evening was set for the contest between the stallion and Norman.

Of this the latter knew nothing until the next day, when he heard about it, not from Smith, but from another of the party, his master taking it for granted that he could dispose of him with as little reference to his own mind in the matter as if he were one of the horses.

Norman's first impulse was flatly to refuse.

Although as brave as need be, he was not foolhardy. He had a fair-sized bump of caution, and he did not see just why he should expose himself to certain danger for the sake of a few dollars or of winning glory for his employer. That sort of work could hardly be considered to fall within the terms of his engagement.

Nor was it the scowling looks nor harsh words of Smith that caused him to change his mind. But he allowed himself to be moved upon by the talk of other members of the party, by the expressed belief of some that the grey stallion could not throw him, and by the outspoken confidence of others that he would get pitched off inside of a minute, and probably have his neck broken.

The end of it was that he agreed to make the trial, though his heart was none too light as he consented.

The halt was made early that evening at a lovely meadow, in a valley through which ran a clear, strong stream; and by the time the animals had been looked after and supper disposed of, there was still a full hour before darkness.

The place and the time were as favourable as could be wished for Norman's daring attempt to tackle the Terror, and the whole company gathered to witness the proceedings.

When Maclellan saw Norman all ready for the fray his heart misgave him a little. He felt as if it were not quite right to expose a mere boy, however sturdy and courageous, to such peril, and so he said:

"The Terror's mighty cross to-day. I'm rather skeered of him myself. Perhaps you'd best not try him. He's feelin' ugly enough to eat you if he gets the chance."

But Norman was not going to back out at this point. He was resolved to at least make one try, and if that failed it would be time to talk of retreat.

"I guess I'll go ahead," he replied, while the crowd murmured approval. "I'll keep a sharp look-out that he doesn't hurt me."

Having quieted his conscience with the warning, Maclellan now went off for his horse,

and presently returned leading him by the bridle held close under the jaw.

The Terror certainly was acting in a way worthy of his name.

Powerful and heavy as his owner was, he had difficulty in keeping him under control, and the vicious brute was making lunges with his cruel teeth, and lashing out with his merciless hoofs as though he would fain kill or maim everybody within reach.

Apart from his wicked temper he was a splendid creature of his kind. Full sixteen hands high, shaped on lines of perfect symmetry, with limbs as sound and hard as iron bars, and a mane and tail of great length and as fine as silk, while his coat of dappled grey fairly glistened, it seemed a thousand pities that he should be so evil of spirit.

But as he pranced about, striving apparently to break away from Maclellan's mighty grip, that he might rush open-mouthed upon the crowd of spectators, he looked the very incarnation of equine viciousness, and a general feeling of pity for Norman went through the company.

He, on his part, while a trifle pale, showed no signs of flinching.

With firm-set face and tightly clenched hands he watched the big horse rearing and plunging, and he said to himself:

"You're full of mischief, and no mistake, and I'm not going to have a picnic with you. But you'll find me stick to you like a burr; see if you don't."

Maclellan held the horse for Norman to mount, but even then it proved no easy matter.

As if quite understanding the situation, the stallion did everything he could to prevent the boy getting into the saddle, again and again making such swift and sudden right-about movements that only Norman's great agility saved him from being run down, or kicked clear off the ground.

This game went on so long that Maclellan began to get tired, and to growl at both the horse and Norman.

"Say," he called out presently, "I'm about sick of this foolin'. If you can't get on his back inside of a minute I'll take him away."

Hardly had he spoken than Norman, by a clever feint which fooled the horse, completely sprang into the saddle, and, grasping the bridle-reins, sang out cheerily:

"Let him go; I'm all right."

With a big grunt of relief Maclellan let go

and jumped aside, expecting the stallion to make a mad plunge the moment he felt Norman upon his back.

But, instead of so doing, the creature stood stock still, while thrills of sheer surprise ran through his great frame, and the spectators held their breath in wondering expectation of what was to follow.

Then, with a scream of rage that was appalling in its intensity, the Terror rose into the air until it seemed as if he must fall over backwards, and crush the life out of his gallant rider.

But Norman was ready for this demonstration, and by skilful use of rein and spur he brought the stallion to his feet again, when the brute's next endeavour was to reach round, and, fastening his teeth in Norman's leg, tear him from the saddle.

This kindly intention the boy foiled by letting him have the toe of his boot hard on his muzzle until he learned the folly of his fierce efforts, and began to try something else.

He now threw his vast energies into a series of furious bounds into the air that were not exactly buck-jumping—he was of too noble a strain to be guilty of that vulgar vice—but



"WITH A SCREAM OF RAGE THE TERROR ROSE INTO THE AIR."

[Page 34.]

simply mad attempts at getting rid of his rider by violence.

And certainly, if Norman had not been as strong of knee as he was of hand, he must inevitably have been hurled from the saddle.

But through it all he sat as steadily as if he were a part of the infuriated animal, and as he began to feel that the contest was promising to end in his favour, the tense expression of countenance relaxed a little, and a slight smile hovered about his lips.

"I reckon he's going to get the best of it," said one of the men to Maclellan, who was watching the struggle with feelings divided between concern for his horse and admiration for the daring boy, "unless the Terror's got some more tricks up his sleeve, and springs them on Norm when he's tired out."

Maclellan simply nodded to show that he heard the speaker. He was too much absorbed in the proceedings to talk.

Up to this time the stallion had confined his wild movements to a comparatively limited space, but now he suddenly changed his line of conduct.

For an instant he paused as if to prepare himself, and then, with another blood-curdling

scream, dashed away across the level meadow at the very top of his speed.

"The river! Look, he's making straight for the river!" cried Maclellan, springing forward as though he would follow.

But any pursuit would have been utterly vain. There was not a horse in the camp that could match the Terror for speed, and, even had there been, the maddened creature would have reached the river ere any one could be mounted.

There was no alternative but to passively await the issue, whatever it might be.

Straight for the river rushed the stallion, presenting a thrilling spectacle as, with head bent down and tail streaming out behind, he fairly flew over the ground with tremendous strides.

Norman sat firmly in the saddle, holding the reins taut, but not wasting his strength in futile efforts to check the flying animal he bestrode, who had the bit in his teeth, and held it there as in a vice.

He saw the river ahead, and knew that there was a fall of some ten feet or so in the bank at the spot towards which the horse was making.

Yet this did not terrify him. The water

was deep and smooth. He could swim like a seal, and he felt far more anxiety on account of the stallion than he did for himself.

On went the Terror, his motion being so graceful and even that under ordinary circumstances the ride would have been a pure delight to Norman. Indeed, as it was, he felt a thrill of pleasure at the splendid speed, and was tempted to rise in the stirrups and shout out :

"Now you're doing it, keep it up. That's the style, my beauty!" just as if he were in the thick of a race.

He did make some effort to change the course of the Terror, and steer him towards a part of the river bank where the descent was not so steep, but the animal could not be guided, and so he let him go, while he gathered himself together for the inevitable leap.

Not pausing for an instant, even when the water gleamed full before his eyes, the stallion sprang out from the bank as though he were simply taking the water-jump in a steeple-chase.

He struck the water quite twenty feet from the shore, and so great was his impulse and his weight that both he and Norman vanished completely in a smother of foam.

Not even then did Norman lose his seat. He knew he was safer in the saddle than out of it, for the horse might injure him in his frantic struggles if he were in the water beside him.

How he managed to hold on he never knew, but he did do it, and when the astonished animal rose to the surface his rider was still in command, and ready to guide him to a good landing.

By this time all the horse's fury was gone from him. The sudden immersion in the water had cooled his blood, and he was realising the impossibility of shaking off his sturdy young rider.

He accordingly permitted himself to be directed ashore, and, Norman having found a place where a slight gully in the bank gave an easy ascent to the level of the meadow, the Terror, now no longer meriting his awe-inspiring nickname, climbed quietly up the slope, and jogged back to the camp, a thoroughly subdued creature.

The cheers and shouts of congratulation with which Norman was greeted fairly made him blush. He had never been the object of so much interest before, and as the men crowded around, shaking his hand, clapping

him on the back, and in their own rough language expressing their admiration of his feat of horsemanship, he was so overwhelmed that he would have been glad to run away from such demonstrations.

Nothing gave him so much pleasure as Maclellan's words. Laying his big hand upon his shoulder, the gigantic leader said warmly :

"You did that just fine, my boy ; I never saw the beat of it. You've got more grit than any fellow of your age I ever come across, and I just want to say this—if I ever have to part with the Terror, and you're around and want the critter, you can have him for the taking."

CHAPTER III.

INDIAN CRAFTINESS.

NORMAN'S victory over the Terror gave him at once a high standing in the expedition. In a company of that composition, pluck and brawn counted for more than brains, and Norman, having shown himself possessed of so large a stock of both, naturally enough won the respect of those with whom he was associated.

Maclellan took a great fancy to him, and would have been glad enough to attach him to himself had the way been open.

But he knew Andy Smith too well to suggest anything of the kind. He was not the man to give up any good thing he had once got hold of, and Norman would be too useful a helper altogether to be parted with.

Yet the mean fellow had not a word of congratulation or approval for Norman upon his success as a "rough-rider."

The truth was that he envied him the attention he had attracted, and grudged him every plaudit, for if there was a jealous, selfish, small-minded creature, it was this same Andy Smith. Could he have had his own way, nobody else would have had any profit or pleasure out of anything.

Still meeting with no serious difficulties or obstacles, Maclellan's company made good progress northward, directing their course towards the Columbia River.

Norman enjoyed the life more and more each day. He had plenty of work, as we have said, but still, in spite of that, there was often a spell of leisure, which he could spend as he pleased.

He loved to ride on ahead whenever he could, leaving the slow-moving waggons far behind. In this way he frequently succeeded in bagging some game that was always a welcome addition to the larder.

As they got farther north, however, Maclellan warned him against going any great distance from the company.

"The redskins round about here don't take very kindly to our trapesing over their hunting-grounds, I can tell you. They daren't do anything while we are all together, but if they

get a chance at any of us when we're by ourselves, they'll make it nasty for us."

Nor was the leader overstating the case.

The Walla Wallas, Palouses, and other tribes whose range was below the boundary line, had no friendly feelings towards the gold-hunters, and only the profound respect in which they held their ability to use rifle and revolver kept them from opposing their progress by force.

In obedience to Maclellan's warning, Norman did not go out of sight of the waggons, and the wisdom of this was tragically illustrated while they were on their way across the great plains of the Columbia.

One of the party was a German named Schneider, who gave a lot of trouble by his slow, lazy ways.

He had a waggon which he drove himself, and he was always the last into camp and the last out of it.

It seemed impossible to hurry him, and Maclellan was often made very angry by his dilatory, sluggish habits, so that time and again he devoutly wished the fellow had not come with him.

One day a storm which had been threatening since noon broke upon the party when they

were not far from the spot determined upon for the camp, and every team was whipped up in order to lose no time in reaching there.

In the hurry and confusion attendant upon making camp, and securing things against the violence of the storm, no one had time to think whether the whole company was accounted for, and not until darkness fell was the absence of Schneider discovered.

Norman, who always felt a kind of pity for the slow-going, good-natured German, was the first to miss him, and he said to Andy Smith :

“Why, where’s Dutchy? He’s not come into camp yet. Guess we left him behind when we made that break for here.”

“What’s it to you where the old fool is?” growled Smith, who seemed to resent Norman’s taking any interest in the matter. “He’s not in your care. It would be a good riddance if we never saw him again, any way.”

Thus rebuffed, Norman said no more to his employer, but a few minutes later seized the opportunity to speak to Maclellan about Schneider’s non-appearance.

“Sure enough,” exclaimed the leader, “old Dutchy’s left behind! Hope the Injuns don’t get on his tracks. He could never stand them

off alone. Reckon we'd best send some of our fellows out to look for him."

The storm had by this time moderated considerably, and the moon was beginning to show herself through the clouds, so that there was promise of a clear, bright night.

Maclellan having called for volunteers for a search-party, the response was prompt and general, so that he had no difficulty in making up a band of twelve who, well mounted and well armed, went back over the trail in search of the missing man.

Norman accompanied them. He did not ask Smith's permission, knowing full well that it would not have been granted if he had, nor did he take one of his horses, but rode a sturdy broncho that Maclellan lent him.

As they increased their distance from the camp without seeing any sign of the German, who, however slowly he might have come along, ought to have been reached sooner, the apprehension that he had fallen into the hands of the Indians became general, and none of the party had much hope of ever seeing him alive again.

They had gone several miles without result, and Maclellan was about decided to turn back and make a more thorough search in the

morning, when his keen eyes discovered a gleam of white some distance ahead that caused him to exclaim :

“Look there ! Isn’t that his waggon ?”

The others thought it was, and accordingly they all pressed forward eagerly.

When they reached the waggon, whose canvas top showed so white in the moonlight, they found their worst fears realised.

Poor Schneider had evidently lagged behind until the rest of the company were out of sight and hearing, and then some prowling rascals of Indians had seen their opportunity.

But, if he was slow, the German had no lack of courage.

There were unmistakable signs of conflict, and of loss inflicted upon his dastardly assailants. He had died like a hero, and as his late companions looked upon his body, stripped and scalped, they gnashed their teeth in impotent rage that they could not avenge their murdered comrade.

To Norman the sight was a shock he never forgot. It was his first acquaintance with death, and his heart felt like bursting as he gazed upon the mangled form of the unfortunate man whom he had been harmlessly chaffing that very morning.

"The cruel curs!" cried Maclellan. "This is what they've been skulking around for the last week. We shouldn't have let poor old Dutchy out of our sight."

The Indians had taken everything of value from the waggon, including the horses, and there was nothing to do but give the body decent burial and return to camp sorrowed by the tragedy, and burning with desire for reprisals upon the redskins.

But there seemed little chance of this being satisfied.

The wily Indians were too shrewd to attempt an attack upon the whole company, and from this time forth the gold-hunters stayed close together, and kept mounted scouts out on all sides to give warning if the Reds should show themselves.

The proximity of the redskins added another trying task to those the travellers already had to fulfil; namely, the watching of their animals at night to prevent them from being stampeded by their foes, and the expedition thus brought to an inglorious end.

The horses and mules had to be turned loose to graze, for that was the only way they had of getting their food, and in this grazing they covered a good deal of ground.

Not knowing in what numbers the Indians might be, and resolved to take no chances of losing their stock, Maclellan decided, after consultation with his companions, that one-half the party should be on guard every night, turn about.

This meant that Norman, who took his turn with the others, although he might easily have begged off on the score of his youth, had to spend alternate nights in the saddle—and very hard work he found it.

But he did not grumble. He did not expect to have an easy time of it. He was quite ready to share in the hardships as well as the pleasures and the profit of the enterprise, and he went on duty at night as cheerfully as anybody.

About a week after the killing of Schneider the party came to the foot of a range of mountains, and it was thought expedient to make a lengthened halt here in order to give the animals a good rest ere beginning the crossing of this range, which would involve very heavy hauling.

The place was most favourable for the purpose. An almost level plain spread out eastward from the foothills, and through it ran a fine stream of water.

From this plain several passes led into the mountain range, and, while the bulk of the party was at rest, some of its members could be exploring these passes, and choosing out the one that offered the easiest route.

Norman would have liked very much to have been permitted to join the party of exploration, but could not manage it, although he hinted very broadly his desire.

Maclellan was in command of it, and on leaving he said to Norman :

"Have an eye to the Terror, like a good boy, will you? I can't take him along with me. He's not good enough at such rough work, and he's kinder taken a liking to you. I guess you'll be able to manage him right enough."

Norman, feeling highly honoured at this commission, accepted it readily. It was true, as Maclellan said, that the big stallion had taken a liking to him.

Ever since the memorable struggle in which Norman won, the Terror had ceased to deserve the name so far as he was concerned.

There was no laying back of ears and lifting of lip when he drew near. On the contrary, the great creature made no disguise of his pleasure at the boy's approach, and

would stretch forth his neck to be patted, and rub his glossy muzzle against Norman's shoulder in an affectionate way that was a constant wonder to the other members of the company, towards whom the Terror's hostility had in no wise abated.

The second night after the exploring party departed, it was Norman's turn to be on guard; and fully armed with rifle, revolver, and knife, he rode out upon the plain over which the animals were scattered.

It was an intensely dark night, the face of the sky being covered with clouds that portended approaching rain, and Norman was conscious of apprehensions of danger which depressed his spirits, and made him peer anxiously to right and left as he moved slowly over the plains.

"I hope the rascals will not try to stampede our stock this night," he said to himself. "They could play mischief with us if they did."

The words had hardly been uttered when the Terror, who was not far from him, and had been grazing quietly, threw up his head and gave a strange, startled whinny that sent a thrill of alarm through Norman.

Evidently the sagacious animal had detected the approach of something suspicious.

But what was it?

A mountain lion that had strayed down from its rocky fastness in quest of a victim, or perchance a grizzly bear on the same fell errand?

If not, it must be the Indians whose scent had reached the stallion's keen nostrils.

Pressing close to the big horse he whispered the question: "What is it, Terror? Which way is it coming?"

Not that he expected any answer, but simply because there was a sense of company in the doing of it.

Dark as it was he could feel rather than see that the noble creature's head was lifted high, and that he was trembling through all his mighty frame.

The next instant the silence of the night, hitherto unbroken save by the Terror's challenging whinny, was filled with blood-curdling whoops that seemed to come from every point of the compass simultaneously.

So appalling was the demoniac chorus that the stoutest human heart might well have been panic-stricken, and that the animals, thus startled out of their rest, should break away in a wild stampede was therefore inevitable.

Most of their guardians went with them, Norman among the number.

Without stopping to think what he was going to do, or into what deadly peril he was rushing, he clapped spurs to his horse and followed the Terror, whose grey form he could just distinguish in the darkness like a shadowy ghost.

His one thought was to keep his charge in sight, and if possible bring him to a stop when the first fright had somewhat spent itself.

Of all his experiences on horseback—and he had had some very exciting ones—that was certainly the strangest and most memorable.

The plunging herd of terrified horses, the piercing whoops of the tawny marauders, the shouts of the gold-seekers striving to get their stampeded animals again under control, and the frequent report of a revolver or rifle, when pale-face or redskin saw a chance to shoot,—all these combined, with the darkness of the night and the frantic recklessness of the gallopade, to produce a scene worthy of pandemonium.

On went Norman, sticking close to the grey stallion, and wondering how it was all going to end.

“If I could only turn him a little,” he said

to himself, "and get him out of the crowd, I might save him."

But this was no easy matter when all were huddled together in wild confusion.

For nearly a mile the rout continued, and then the pace began to slacken. The horses got winded, and not even the fierce yells of their would-be captors could keep them going at the same rate.

Now came Norman's opportunity. Getting alongside the Terror, he spoke soothingly to him, and at the same time edged him away from the other horses.

The noble animal really seemed to divine his purpose, for he obeyed at once, and soon Norman had the satisfaction of finding himself separated from the mob, and veering off to the right.

His idea was, by making a wide circuit, to get back to the camp without encountering any of the Indians; and so, slipping his lariat around the Terror's neck, he set out with a lightened heart.

He felt sure that the other men would be able to take care of themselves and their horses, and as Andy Smith was among them he would not fail to do what he could to save his team.

"I do hope we shan't lose any horses or mules," he soliloquised. "We've got such heavy loads that we need them all."

He could not see any sign of the camp, and had to feel his way, as it were, through the darkness.

He was, therefore, not greatly surprised when he found himself by the river, at a place where the bank was so steep that had he gone over it he must infallibly have broken his neck.

By this time the noise of the stampede had disappeared completely, and he felt himself utterly alone in the darkness.

"Never mind, old Terror," he said affectionately, to his equine companion. "Those rascally redskins won't get you this time if I can help it."

Just then a new idea flashed into his mind.

To return to the camp directly might not be the wisest plan after all, for there were, perhaps, other Indians lurking in the neighbourhood on the chance of being able to plunder it if most of the men should be drawn out after the stampeded animals.

Could he only find a snug hollow near by he might stay in it until daylight, and then make his way back,

Accordingly he dismounted, and, leading the two horses, groped about for what he wanted.

Continuing along the river bank a little, he presently came to a sort of gully that led down from the plain to the water.

This was just what he sought, and, descending it cautiously, he found a place that exactly suited him.

"Now, fellows," he said, speaking to the horses as though they were human beings, "you and I are going to stay right here until daylight. So just you keep as quiet as you know how, for if you make any row there's no telling what might happen to us."

Never did the time seem to pass more slowly than on that long night watch.

Although he had thus escaped with his charge from the hands of the marauders for the moment, there was no assurance that they might not find him out; and then, again, even though he were undisturbed during the night, he might find his way back to camp barred in the morning.

The horses soon forgot their panic and settled down to rest; but there was no rest for him.

His mind was full of concern, not merely

for himself, but for the other members of the party.

Would they succeed in saving their animals? or would the scoundrels, who had been hanging on the heels of the expedition like evil birds of prey, accomplish their villainy?

Not until morning could this question be answered, and in the meantime he must only wait, hoping for the best.

CHAPTER IV.

CROSSING THE COLUMBIA.

AT break of dawn Norman was alert, and eagerly scanning the country round for signs of the dreaded Indian.

To his vast relief he not only could discover no cause for alarm on that account, but far away to the north the white tops of the waggons showed out, and he gladly exclaimed:

“Hurrah! there’s the camp! Come along now, Terror, we must make tracks back.”

Changing saddle and bridle from his own broncho to the stallion, a proceeding of which the latter evidently quite approved, he picked his way up the river bank, and reaching the level prairie set off at an easy canter, leaving the broncho to follow, which the creature readily did.

The camp seemed about two miles distant, and the most direct route thither was beside the river.

Norman had gone about half a mile, and was cantering along gaily, feeling quite proud of himself for having taken care of his horses, and wondering whether Andy Smith had been equally successful.

"If he's lost any of them, he'll be as cross as a bear with a sore head," he said to himself, laughing.

Suddenly up from one of the gullies that cut into the bank there rose the head of an Indian, followed closely by another, and yet another.

They were between him and the camp, and they had guns in hand ready for use upon him.

In an instant his decision was made.

Drawing his revolver, he fired three shots as rapidly as he could pull the trigger, and then, throwing himself forward upon the stallion's neck, while he thrust the spurs deep into his side, he shot away across the prairie like the wind.

The stratagem was entirely successful. Taken aback by its suddenness, the Indians naturally dodged down to evade Norman's bullets, and ere they could recover themselves he was off.

They all fired at him then, but fortunately

they did so in too much of a hurry to aim carefully, and the bullets whistled harmlessly past him, while by the time they got their horses up out of the gully he had gained so long a start that it was useless to follow him.

They therefore went off in the other direction, one of them nursing his arm where Norman's bullet had lodged, inflicting a painful wound.

As for Norman, after making a slight circuit he returned to his course, and presently reached the camp in good order.

Here he met with a great reception, the men crowding about him and showering questions upon him so thick and fast that he was fairly bewildered.

It seemed that he had been given up for lost, together with the Terror, and from the hearty expressions of joy at his safe return it was easy to see what a favourite he was in the camp.

On calling the roll and taking count of the stock, it was found that the Indians had carried off only two horses and three mules, and that one of the expedition had been wounded in the *mêlée*, whereas there was every reason to believe that several Indians

had been killed or wounded for their pains.

When Maclellan returned from his exploration and heard all about it he was greatly pleased with the men in general and with Norman in particular.

"But for you, my boy," he said, giving him a hearty thump on the back, "I'd never lay eyes on the Terror again, and, whatever else becomes of him, I don't want those rascally redskins to get their clutches on him. I'd sooner shoot him."

He had found an easy pass through the mountain range, and without further delay the company resumed their journey, fording the river at a favourable place not far from the camp.

The passage of the range proved a difficult and exhausting task for both men and animals. The heavy waggons had to be very carefully handled, and many a time it seemed as if one or other of them would go hurtling down the rocky slopes, where they would smash to atoms.

But Maclellan seemed equal to every emergency. He came as near being in two places at once as was possible, and gave not only his cool, clear brain, but his gigantic

strength, without stint to the solving of the difficulties of the route, directing and inspiring the other men, until at last the range was crossed without serious mishap, and the gold-hunters came out upon a broad plain that looked like a paradise to them after the mountain pass.

They halted for a much-needed rest when they reached the rich prairie, and Norman, who had been working as hard as any of them, was glad to take it easy for a while.

During this interval of quiet, Norman was a good deal in the company of Maclellan. He had an immense admiration for the stalwart leader, who was to him the realisation of his boyish conception of a hero; and he loved to be near him and hear him speak and watch his actions.

Maclellan on his part had entertained a strong liking for Norman ever since his exciting tussle with the Terror. Indeed, he now openly expressed his regret to his companions that he could not take the boy into his employ.

He said as much one day to Norman when they were together, and the lad's prompt response was :

"I'd give anything to be with you instead of with Andy Smith. Do you think he'd let me

go if he could get somebody else in my place? He's mighty hard on me most of the time, and I'd be right glad to get away from him."

"I'll see him about it, Normie," said Maclellan. "I don't much think he'll let you off. No one knows when he's got a good thing better than Andy. He's about as mean as they make 'em—that's what he is."

He accordingly broached the matter to Smith, undertaking to get him some one in Norman's place; but his proposition was so gruffly rejected that his temper was touched, and the two men came within an ace of an outbreak, for only Maclellan's sense of duty to his position as leader prevented him from giving Smith a sound thrashing.

A consequence of this was, Smith treated Norman more harshly than ever, doing his best to make his life miserable; but the boy bore it bravely, strengthening his heart by the hope that it would only be for a little while, and that when they got to the gold-fields things would be different.

The progress of the party towards the boundary-line was marked by no special incident until they reached the Columbia River, which was too wide and deep to be forded.

"Now, boys," said Maclellan to the as-

sembled company, "we've got the toughest job ahead of us we've had yet, and we'll have to all pull together like well-broken steers to manage it. This big river has got to be crossed right here, and we must help one another to do it."

But how was it to be done? The noble river seemed to present an impassable barrier in the absence of an adequate ferry, and there was not a boat or scow within hundreds of miles of the party.

Yet Maclellan showed no signs of being nonplussed.

"Ye needn't look so blue!" he exclaimed, observing the troubled expression of the others. "We're not going to stay on this side of the river. I've got a scheme for crossing that'll work all right, I reckon."

There was a dramatic element in Maclellan's nature that led him to keep his own counsel until what he had to say could be brought out with the most effect; and so now, although there arose a chorus of eager questions—"What's your scheme? Out with it, Mac." "Got a steamboat up your sleeve?" "Where's your ferry?" and so forth, some in fun and some in earnest—he gave the inquirers no satisfaction.

"Just you stay here a spell," he said, with a significant smile. "There's nothing to be scared of. The Indians are all friendly. I'm going up river a bit ; I'll be back soon, and then you'll see what my little dodge is."

Taking two men with him he rode off, leaving the others completely in the dark as to how the crossing of the Columbia was to be accomplished.

When Maclellan returned, it was not on horseback, but by water, and in a huge wooden canoe, the like of which Norman had never seen before.

It was formed from the trunk of a single tree, hollowed and shaped until it made a craft fit to face a storm, and to carry many tons of cargo.

There were four of these canoes, each having four Indians to paddle it, and the redskins evidently entertained no small opinion of their mighty canoes and themselves.

Yet, as Norman looked at them, he wondered how the clumsy waggons were to be ferried across the broad, swift stream ; for, big as the canoes were, being some sixty feet in length by three in beam, they certainly could not contain a waggon.

This bewilderment was shared by the others,

who were not in the leader's secret, and they pelted him with questions as before.

"Don't get excited," he replied, evidently enjoying the situation. "Keep cool, keep cool. This chap knows what he's about, though *you* can't make out what he's driving at."

Having selected a part of the bank that afforded an easy slope to the water's edge, Maclellan had the canoes drawn up there, and then his device became clear.

The four canoes were strongly lashed together in pairs, thus making two vessels of the catamaran order that were capable of bearing an enormous load.

"Now, then, boys," cried Maclellan, "all you've got to do is to take your stuff out of the waggons, run them into the canoes, pile the stuff beside them, and paddle across. The critters can swim over by themselves."

So admirable was the arrangement that the men paid their leader the compliment of a hearty cheer for his ingenuity, and at once proceeded to carry out his directions.

It was a case of long pull, strong pull, and all pull together, for the getting of the heavy waggons into the canoes was no easy job.

But the men worked with a will, and soon

had three waggons afloat on one of the catamarans, which the Indians paddled over to the other side.

The crossing of the Columbia proceeded prosperously all that day, and by nightfall one-half the waggons were over.

Among those still left was Andy Smith's, and when the next morning proved dark and threatening, and the wind was blowing in a way that betokened a storm, Norman was greatly disappointed.

"I guess there'll be no getting across to-day," he said to Smith, as he looked at the dark, turbulent flood.

"What have you got to say about it?" was the sharp response. "It don't lie with you whether we do or not. Scared of a little wind, are you?"

Norman reddened with indignation, but wisely held his tongue. There was nothing to gain by replying. It would only elicit more hard words from his cross-grained employer.

Nevertheless he wondered if Smith would venture to cross the river, and if he could get others to join him in the attempt.

The canoes were all on their side, but the Indians might refuse to take the risk.

However, he was not left long in doubt. In spite of the lowering look of the sky and the rising wind, Smith was determined to get across.

"We've been foolin' here too long already," he said in a tone that implied the delay was due to somebody else's mismanagement; and another waggon-owner being of the same mind they ordered the Indians to get ready.

The latter were evidently very reluctant to do so. They were more weather-wise than the white men, and they knew the river better.

They pointed out the risks and dangers, but Smith only stormed at them, and the other waggon-owner, whose name was Butler, offered extra pay; so at last they were induced to make the trial.

The two waggons were tightly lashed in place, their contents piled beside them, and off the twin-canoe started, Smith, Butler, and Norman taking paddles so as to help the Indians.

They made fairly good progress until they reached the middle of the river, but just then the threatened storm broke upon them, the rain coming down in torrents, and

the wind raising white caps on the river's bosom.

Putting all their strength into their strokes the occupants of the canoes, both red and white, strove to keep the clumsy catamaran in its course.

But the elements were too strong for the rash voyagers, and in spite of their utmost exertion they found themselves going down the stream instead of across it, while the waves were breaking over the gunwale in an ominous fashion.

Andy Smith got terribly excited. He held everybody and everything but himself to blame for his perilous plight, and he fairly filled the air with yells as he saw the water drenching his goods and threatening to swamp the canoes.

No amount of bluster, however, could improve the situation, and one of the other men, disgusted at the fellow's language, shouted to him :

"Dry up there, Andy, or I'll put a bullet into you! What good's all your venom goin' to do us here, I'd like to know?"

Whereat Smith had sufficient sense left to take heed, and his wild threatenings subsided into an unintelligible growl.

Norman meantime was toiling away at the paddles as steadily as any of the Indians.

He could not see how they were going to get out of their critical position, but it seemed no use sitting with folded hands notwithstanding. It was just as well to be working, even if the work apparently went for nothing.

"If the canoes do go down, I think I might swim ashore," he said to himself, measuring the distance with his eye. "But I guess I'd rather not have to try it."

With the river at rest he undoubtedly could have done it, but it was a different matter in this turbulent torrent.

Presently the Indians gave up their efforts to effect a crossing, and, turning their canoes down-stream, set to paddling harder than ever.

Not understanding their purpose, Andy Smith broke forth again.

"What on earth are ye doin'?" he yelled. "Ye'll never get across that way. Head her up! Head her up, I tell you, or I'll shoot you!" And, dropping his paddle, he drew his revolver and pointed it at one of the paddlers.

Norman thrilled with apprehension.

If the Indians refused to obey Smith, and he fired at them, they would drop their paddles, and the canoes, becoming unmanageable, would inevitably founder.

But before Smith could speak again or pull trigger the report of another revolver rang out, and the one that he was holding spun out of his hand and plumped into the water, where it instantly vanished.

"Who fired that shot?" roared Smith in a perfect paroxysm of fury, as he gazed this way and that with the look of a wounded tiger.

"I did, since you're so anxious to know," responded Jack Butler, who was renowned as the best pistol-shot in the company; "and if ye don't keep still and quiet I'll put the next one into your ugly carcase!" and he raised his revolver as he spoke.

Smith was a ruffian, but he wasn't a fool, and he knew Jack Butler too well not to realise that the latter had in every way the best of the argument, seeing that his own revolver lay at the bottom of the river.

Accordingly, with a snarl of baffled rage, he flung himself back in the canoe, and Butler called out to the Indians:

"Go ahead, play your own game. We'll give you a free hand."

Norman, watching it all in silence, forgot for the moment their imminent peril in the pleasure his employer's double discomfiture afforded him.

If ever a man richly deserved a taking down it was Andy Smith, truculent tyrant that he was! And he certainly had had it this time.

"How I wish I could shoot like Jack Butler!" Norman said to himself, as he put a new hero in his heart beside Dan Maclellan. "I wonder would he show me how, if I asked him?" and he resolved to prefer the request the first time he got the chance.

But the imminence of their peril the next instant drove from his mind all other thought than how they were to be saved from a watery grave.

Being now pointing down-stream, the heavily laden canoes fairly tore along under the triple impetus of current, wind, and paddle. They seemed to be heading for inevitable destruction, and Norman marvelled what could be the Indians' design in thus apparently giving up the struggle.

The waves still broke over the gunwale from time to time, although not so badly as before, and the other members of the party who were on board were evidently as much at a loss as Norman to make out how it would all end.

CHAPTER V.

HELD UP BY THE INDIANS.

FOR about a quarter of a mile the canoes kept in their course, and then the plan of the red men began to reveal itself.

A little farther down, the river took a rather sharp bend, beyond which was a sort of bay, where the water was comparatively calm.

If they could only make this bay they would be all right, but they would have run all the risk they had done for nothing, as it was on the side from which they had started.

As soon as Jack Butler understood what the Indians meant, he shouted to the other men :

“ Begorrah, paddle your best now ! Break your backs or your paddles, if you loike, but paddle ! ”

And he set them the example by making his own stout blade bend as if it were a willow wand.

For some minutes the issue was in doubt, the river seeming determined to sweep the canoes on past the haven of safety.

But presently the tremendous exertions of the paddlers began to tell. Little by little the clumsy craft crept nearer the point, and at last, rounding it neatly, pushed into the bay, where all danger of swamping was over.

“Faith, but we did it finely, me boys!” exclaimed Butler, dropping his paddle with a deep sigh of relief, and wiping his forehead, from which the perspiration was pouring; “and it’s a nice little bit of exercise we’ve been after havin’ this mornin’, to be sure. Begorra! Andy Smith, it’s meself that hopes you’ll be contint to believe the Indians the next time, eh!” and he gave Smith such a quizzical look that the others burst into a roar of laughter.

Smith was evidently furious enough to have shot Butler on the spot. Not only had his attempt to cross proved a miserable failure, but he had been made doubly ridiculous before the eyes of his companions by Butler’s

action in shooting the revolver from his hand.

Yet he had sufficient sense to hold his tongue, vowing to himself that he would get even with Butler before long.

It was decided not to unload the canoes of the waggon, but just to take out the goods which had got wet, and let them get dry, postponing the crossing of the river until the following day.

By that time the storm had passed away, the water was smooth, and they got across without any difficulty.

As they neared the boundary-line which they proposed to cross near the Okonagan River, keeping on the east side of the river, increased precautions were taken against the Indians, who were known to be hostile.

"We can't keep too sharp a look-out for the pesky redskins," said Maclellan. "They're not goin' to let us into British Columbia if they can stop us. They've a notion we want to take the country from them, I guess."

In this Maclellan was quite correct. The Indians did not regard at all favourably the intrusion of the gold-hunters. Many

of the pioneers of the Fraser River gold-fields had paid for their enterprise with their lives, and their naked, mutilated bodies had been sent down-stream as a ghastly warning to those who were following in their track.

But the gold-hunters had small respect for either the patriotism or the selfishness of the red men, who wanted to keep their ancestral hunting-grounds to themselves.

The latter knew nothing about the precious metal, whose value far outweighed, in the minds of the prospectors, that of everything else in the country, the Indians themselves included. They had no use for gold, even if they knew how to find it, and so they could only be considered as cumberers of the ground and be treated accordingly.

Norman greatly hoped there would be no fighting, not because he had any fear as to the results, for the expedition seemed strong enough to overcome any opposition the Indians might offer, but because, as a truly brave lad, he loathed bloodshed. He did not see why a treaty could not be made with the red men, and terms of peace arranged whereby they would be recompensed for the invasion of their territory. That would be only just

and fair, and would surely pay better in the long run.

But this was not the opinion held by the rest of the company. They would no more demean themselves to negotiate with Indians than with coyotes or panthers. The native dwellers in that country were on the same plane as the wild beasts, and no more entitled to consideration. Holding these views, there could of course be only one issue of their meeting with the Indians, and that was war to the death.

A few miles below the boundary-line the expedition reached at nightfall a plateau, where they camped.

From this plateau their road lay through a cañon, on either side of which the hills rose sharply. The Okonagan River ran to the west of them.

In the morning Norman was up somewhat earlier than his wont, and looking out for the horses, which had, as usual, been let loose to graze.

He found his own team quickly enough, and drove them to the waggons, but he could see nothing of the Terror.

"Where can that rascal of a grey fellow be?" he exclaimed, sweeping the plateau

with his glance, and finding no trace of the missing animal. "I wonder if he could have strayed into the cañon? I guess I'll have a look."

Mounting his own broncho, and taking no arms save the revolver that always hung at his hip, he rode into the cañon, quite realising that he was thereby running some risk, but willing to take it for the sake of finding the stallion.

"It's a mighty good place for Indians, it seems to me," he said to himself. "If they want to stop our way, just here's the spot."

He was right enough.

A mere handful of Indians, if well armed and having a good supply of ammunition, could hold the heights which commanded the cañon against a force many times their size. At no previous part of the journey had nature been so much in their favour.

Norman had gone some little way into the cañon, and was quite out of sight of the camp, when to his delight he discovered the Terror not far ahead.

"Ah! there you are, you rogue!" he cried out. "What possessed you to come away

up here? There's no grass to be got among the rocks."

Cantering up to the stallion he turned him towards the camp, and giving him a smart crack on the hind-quarters with the end of his lariat, called to him: "Get along with you now. Make for camp as fast as you know how."

The stallion kicked up his heels and started off, and at that moment Norman, happening to glance up at the heights, caught sight of an Indian peering over the edge of a rock, while a gun-barrel flashed in the morning sunlight.

"Now I'm done for!" he gasped, and bending low upon his horse's neck he drove in his spurs, shouting:

"Go it now, Brownie—go it for your life!"

The broncho responded gamely, and, the Terror being startled into his best pace, they thundered madly down the cañon, from whose sides one report after another rang out showing that the Indians were there in force

It was a terrible gauntlet to run, and a thrill of excitement shot through the fleeing boy as each rifle cracked.

Instinctively he clung closer to his horse,

expecting every moment to have a bullet strike him in the back.

Happily the Indians were poor marksmen, and, seeing how rapidly Norman was moving, Jack Butler himself might have been excused for finding him hard to hit.

He was nearing the mouth of the cañon. Fifty yards more, and he would be in the open, when, to his consternation, he saw two Indians, one on either hand, waiting for him close by the road.

“Oh!” he groaned despairingly, “how can I get past those?”

Yet it was not in him to submit tamely, however great the odds against him might appear.

Drawing his revolver—and how thankful he felt for having it with him!—he kept bent down upon his horse’s neck until he was within ten yards of his waiting foes.

Then, suddenly raising himself in the saddle, he fired first at one and then at the other, so quickly that the two shots sounded almost like one, at the same time letting out a yell the red men themselves could hardly have surpassed.

Both bullets told—one burying itself in the neck of the Indian on his right, and the

other smashing the elbow of the fellow on his left.

The first rolled over in mortal agony, the second dropped his gun with a scream of pain, and clapped his hand to the wound, while Norman dashed by unhurt, shouting:

"Now, you rascals, will you try to stop me? I guess you got it hot this time."

A second volley from the main body of the Indians posted on the heights followed him as he sped out of the cañon, but no bullet found him, and highly elated at his escape he galloped into camp, where everybody was now aroused.

"The cañon's full of them!" he panted, as he came up to Maclellan. "They're as thick as skeeters. They came mighty near getting my scalp, I tell you."

Maclellan's face grew grave at the news. He had been anticipating trouble, to be sure, but this did not make it any less unwelcome.

He would much prefer reaching the gold-fields without shedding blood, for he was not a cruel man, and if the Indians would only leave him alone he certainly would not molest them.

If, however, they were determined to seek

to kill and mutilate, then he would show them no quarter.

Calling the company together, he explained to them the situation.

"The varmints have the best of us in one way," he said. "They're up on the hills, and we've got to go along the cañon. But we mustn't mind that if we're going to get through. My notion is that we divide up into two parties—one to go up the cañon, and the other to make a try for the hills so as to get behind the rascals if it can be done. Now then, boys, which party are you goin' with. Let us hear you shout."

So many spoke at once that the leader could not distinguish between them, and he called out :

"You're all mixed up, so as I can't make out what you say. Do you fellows that'll go with me up the cañon stand on my right, and the rest on my left."

Jack Butler was the first to move, and he went to Maclellan's right. Others followed him until about one-third of the party had thus volunteered. Then there was a stop, and Maclellan, looking around with a half-amused, half-reproachful smile on his

handsome countenance, said in a gentle drawl :

“You’re not just tumbling over each other in your anxiety for the best part of the fun, are you? I reckon I’ll need some more of ye if Normie’s given us a straight story.”

At this there was a fresh movement, which continued until the majority of the men were beside Maclellan, and he looked well pleased.

“That’s better,” he said. “That’ll do now. Everybody see to his shooting-irons. We can’t afford to take any chances.”

Andy Smith was not one of those who volunteered. He much preferred trying the hills.

But Norman did. Wherever Maclellan led he was ready to follow, and he resolved to keep as close to the leader as he could, not for his own protection, but that he might, perchance, be of service to him in some emergency.

The men scattered to get their rifles and revolvers ready, and to see that their ammunition was in good order. It was also necessary to round up the stock close by the waggons, and to arrange for some of the men to remain

on guard, lest they might be stampeded in the absence of their owners.

Then, having had a hearty breakfast, for which the coming peril seemed only to give them keener appetites, they were ready for the fray.

It was not a case for a gallant charge with ringing shouts of assured victory, but for a slow, cautious advance, taking advantage of every bit of cover the country afforded.

Maclellan led his division of the party. He was a veteran Indian fighter. No trick or stratagem of the wily redskins could deceive him.

Norman was close at his side, although the leader had said to him :

“Don't ye think ye'd best stay by the waggons? There'll be some warm work before we get through.”

To which he responded :

“That's all right. I'll take my chance with the rest of you.”

Marching up to the mouth of the cañon the gold-hunters broke ranks, and each man, looking out for himself, entered the perilous passage.

They were not long kept in doubt as to the character of their reception.

As soon as they came within range, puffs of white smoke darted out from the heights, followed by sharp reports; and the ping of leaden bullets striking the rocks near the invaders was anything but music to their ears.

Yet the Indians by no means had it all to themselves. Wherever a tawny head showed, or a rifle-barrel gleamed, thither went the white men's bullets, and not always without effect.

Only a slight advance had been made when it became clear that, not satisfied with the natural advantages of their position, the Indians had strengthened it by constructing rude breastworks of rock, from behind which they peppered away at their enemies.

When Maclellan discovered this he was for the moment quite nonplussed, as he had never imagined that they would take such means to defend the cañon.

"Confound the critters!" he exclaimed in a disgusted tone. "That's what I call taking a mean advantage. How are we goin' to get them out of those forts they've built up there?"

It was a pertinent question, the answer to which did not seem just as obvious as he and his companions would have liked.

If those who had gone to the hills in the hope of overlapping and outflanking the Indians were successful, their assistance would be invaluable, and would probably turn the scale in favour of the gold-hunters, but so far nothing had been heard from them, and the failure of their plan was not at all unlikely.

"I reckon we'd better try and rush them," was Maclellan's decision after briefly considering the situation. "It'll be a risky business, but we might as well be at it as be foolin' down here, and gettin' no farther ahead."

So the word was passed along the line to make ready for a charge up the hillsides.

At the signal of their leader the men sprang forward, not standing erect, so as to give the Indians every chance to hit them, but stooping low, and moving by irregular leaps and bounds, firing their rifles whenever they caught sight of a head above the breastworks.

Undaunted by their enemies' approach the redskins held their ground, keeping up a fusilade of shots that would assuredly have wrought fearful execution had their firearms and ammunition been of better quality.

As it was, three of the attacking party were killed and thrice as many wounded, so that Maclellan was fain to order a retreat lest the loss of life should be even more serious.

Both he and Norman had several narrow escapes, but both were fortunate enough to come off scratchless.

The latter had a particularly exciting time, for through his anxiety to get at the doughty red men, he was led into an exposed situation, where he offered a fine mark for their bullets, several of which struck the rocks within a few inches of him.

Happily he soon succeeded in crawling to the cover afforded by a boulder, and was less reckless hereafter.

The three men killed were Hurley, Rice, and Evans, all Californians, and valuable members of the party, being veteran prospectors.

One of them was shot close by Norman, the bullet piercing his brain; and when Norman saw him fall back and die without a groan his heart became filled with pity and rage, and if he could have annihilated the whole band of Indians at one blow he would have been glad to do it at that moment.

It was very provoking and disheartening to have to retreat, but Maclellan was wise in not continuing the fight then.

The actual strength of the Indians could not be ascertained. Judging from their firing there were at least a hundred of them behind the breastworks, while perhaps as many more occupied the heights above.

Shortly after Maclellan's division retreated to camp, those who had gone into the hills for the purpose of outflanking the Indians returned.

They had no reason to be proud of themselves, for they had lost their way, and accomplished nothing, not even the bagging of a single redskin.

It was a very cross and discouraged company which gathered about the waggons that night. The events of the day had cast a gloom over all spirits, and many were the schemes proposed to meet the emergency.

Some were for turning back and striking off in another direction. Others advocated a night attack upon the Indians' fastnesses.

While they were thus deliberating, those who were watching the stock came rushing in shouting :

“The grass is on fire! The Reds are trying to burn us out!”

Sure enough, the dry grass of the plateau had been ignited, and the flames were bearing down upon the camp!

CHAPTER VI.

A SUCCESSFUL STRATAGEM.

AT the alarm of fire the camp was instantly thrown into wild confusion, each man rushing off to look after his own animals, not knowing whether there might not be behind the roaring conflagration a horde of yelling savages, thirsty for pale-face blood.

Out of the bewildering din and chaos rose Maclellan's stentorian voice giving commands that, at first unheeded, presently secured attention, and, being obeyed, resulted in the recovery of order.

The horses were safely gathered, and driven back behind the waggon, and then all hands set to work to fight the fires.

It was hot, hard work, and abominably uncomfortable.

Norman thought he must suffocate as the pungent smoke enswathed him, and he knew not where to turn to avoid it.

For a time it seemed as if the diabolic device

would be only too successful, and the gold-hunters would have to flee for their lives, leaving their property to be a prey to the flames.

But with desperate, determined courage they fought on, some having their beards burned off their faces, and others getting painfully scorched, yet none giving up, until at last their efforts were crowned with success, and the danger had been overcome.

Maclellan voiced the feelings of all when he exclaimed in a tone of utter disgust :

“ My word, if this isn't the toughest time I've ever had with those varmints. They're full of evil without discount. We've got to think out some other plan of circumventing them, that's sure.”

Accordingly the men gathered in consultation, and many methods were suggested of getting the better of the resolute red men.

But none of them met with the leader's approval. With a few incisive words he would point out their impracticability and dismiss them from attention.

The conference had lasted an hour, and seemed still far from a satisfactory result, when Norman, who had got a good view of the situation while hunting up the Terror, asked if he might propose a plan.

There was a general laugh at this, the men in their self-conceit not crediting the boy with being able to think of anything better than had occurred to them, but Maclellan told them to "shut up," saying :

"Keep your laughin' till the young fellow's had his say. I'd not be surprised for one if he's got the best notion of the lot."

Thus encouraged, Norman spoke out :

"I was just thinking that we might get round the Indians by the river if we were to build rafts, and work it that way. There's a good bunch of timber just over there, and it wouldn't take us long to knock a couple of good rafts together, and then we could pole them up-stream till we're behind the hills they've got their forts on."

Here Norman stopped, his face flushing warmly at his own audacity, but instantly Maclellan sprang up, and, slapping his thigh with his hand, exclaimed enthusiastically :

"Yes ; the young fellow's got it ! Why didn't some of us think of that ? It's a great scheme, and we'll go right at it the first thing in the morning."

The majority of the company agreed with their leader, although there were some dissenters, Andy Smith amongst them ; and

with their minds relieved by having a definite plan of action they settled down for the night.

Although they had been cheated out of half their night's rest, everybody in camp was awake at dawn, and getting ready for the important work of the day.

Maclellan, after careful consideration, laid out his plan of campaign on these lines :

All hands were to assist in building the rafts. When these were completed, the party would divide into two companies, one of which was to make a feint of forcing the cañon, and thus engage the attention of the Indians, while the other would take the rafts up the river.

Maclellan assumed command of the raft-party, and Norman of course went with him.

He had had quite enough of the cañon for the present, and was anxious for fresh experience, which he certainly stood in a very fair way to get.

Whether the Indians would leave their breastworks in order to attack the rafts was a matter of uncertainty. In order to do so with any effect they would have to expose themselves to the fire of the gold-hunters, and it was not their way to do that if they could possibly avoid it ; yet they were evidently

very determined, and there was no telling how recklessly they might act.

However, the only way to find this out was to give them the chance, and so the rafts were manned, and started upon their venturesome voyage, while those who did not go on board them advanced towards the cañon.

The current ran rather swiftly, and it was hard work forcing the unwieldy rafts against it, but every man had his pole, and steady if slow progress was made.

Norman quite enjoyed the operation. Maclellan had stationed him at the front of the foremost raft to look out for rocks and shallows, not to mention Indians ; and, rifle in hand, he stood there like a statue, his brain busy with conjectures as to what would be the end of it all.

More than once he thought he discovered one of the enemy lurking on the hilltop, and was just about to give the alarm when a second view showed it to be only some startled animal making for cover.

The sound of the firing in the cañon could be faintly heard, and Maclellan said grimly :

“ There'll be more powder than blood

wasted, I reckon. No scalps to be taken in that scrimmage."

When the rafts had got about a mile up the river they were pushed ashore, and the men disembarked.

Not a glimpse of the Indians had been obtained, and Jack Butler, whose fingers were itching for the trigger, said, as he looked about him :

"The varmints aren't as long-headed as they sometimes get credit for being. If they knew their business they would never have let us land here, that's sure."

Securing the rafts in case they again might need them, the gold-hunters hurried up the slope, and reached the summit of the ridge without opposition.

"Ah!" exclaimed Maclellan triumphantly, as he looked down the hillside where the puffs of smoke revealed the position of the Indians, "I rather think we've got you just where we want you, now."

It certainly looked as if the redskins were neatly trapped, for their opponents had got behind and above them, so that their stone breastworks were no longer of any use, while escape down the cañon was cut off by the party stationed there.

The men from the rafts had come within rifle-shot ere the Indians discovered them.

When they did they lost no time in considering whether they should hold their ground or take refuge in flight, for with one accord they scrambled out of their rocky defences, and fled in every direction that was not closed to them by their assailants.

Making the air ring with triumphant shouts Maclellan and his men rushed after them.

Not only must they be dispersed, but they must be taught a lesson that would not need to be repeated. They were therefore shown no quarter, and the three members of the company who had been killed the previous day were amply avenged.

Norman, however, took no part in the pursuit.

Once the Indians were put to flight he could not bring himself to fire upon them in cold blood. He was quite ready to do his share of the fighting, but not to play the part of avenger. He left that to the others, and went down the cañon to the camp to look after his horses.

Having followed their foes as far as they could, and inflicted heavy loss upon them,

the gold-hunters returned very tired and very hungry, but very triumphant.

"There now!" Maclellan cried as he threw himself down beside the waggons, and wiped the perspiration from his face with the top of his cap, "that ought to do the rascals good. They'll know better now, I guess, than to try to interfere with decent people who've got no quarrel with them."

"How many of them did we put a bullet into, do you think?" inquired Ned Thompson, who felt particularly bloodthirsty because one of the three members of the party killed by the Indians had been his mate.

"Oh, I couldn't say," replied Maclellan, "but nigh on to a score, any way. The fools!" he went on in a kind of indignant tone, as if he were wroth with the Indians for rendering such action on the part of the white men necessary; "why can't they leave us alone? We're not going to hurt them by coming into their territory after the gold that they'd never have the sense to get themselves. For my part, I'd a big sight rather pay them something than shoot them; but they always shoot first, and then you've just got to shoot back, and that's all there is to say about it."

The most of his associates held the same views. They were gold-hunters, not scalp-hunters, and would much prefer friendly relations with the Indians.

Not so Andy Smith. In his eyes the only good Indian was a dead one, and he carefully kept tally of the number he killed by making marks on the butt of his rifle.

Norman, who had come to know him pretty well by this time, had a strong suspicion that this was not his only way of noting his success with the bullet, but that he at every chance took the scalp-lock of his stricken foe, although he had sense enough not to make a display of his hideous trophies.

The gold-hunters were very well pleased with themselves for having so thoroughly routed their opponents, and celebrated the victory by a jubilation in camp that came near being a disgraceful orgie.

Only their leader's remarkable control over them kept them in check. As it was, quite half of their number got the worse for whiskey, and needed watching lest they should take to fighting amongst themselves.

Disgusted with their conduct and bothered by their noise, Norman took upon himself the part of sentinel.

He went out to the plateau, far enough away from the camp for the drunken racket to be softened by distance, and, throwing himself on the dry grass, began to soliloquise in this fashion :

“Well, here I am nearly in sight of the gold country, and I wonder what there is for me in it? From what the men say, it's only just a few that make a big thing at the gold-mines. The most of them come out no richer than they went in, and a good many just die there without doing anything. It seems a pretty cheeky thing for a youngster like me to try his luck, but I couldn't stay quiet at home. They didn't need me there, and I might as well be here. There's one thing sure, I'm not goin' back home with empty pockets. If I can't make my fortune at the gold-fields, I'll just try something else, that's all, and Walla Walla won't see me again until I can go back with good money to show.”

While he thus mused he caught sight of some dark forms moving as silently as shadows to the right of him, and, springing up, he peered after them, asking himself :

“Can that be Indians trying a night attack on us?”

The dark forms seemed to draw nearer, and Nórman thought no time should be lost in giving the alarm.

Taking careful aim, therefore, at the nearest one, he fired, and then made for the camp as hard as he could run, shouting :

“The Indians ! The Indians ! Get ready !”

His cries put a sudden stop to the revelling, and, sobered by the sense of immediate danger, the men grabbed their rifles and prepared for the threatened attack.

But none came. No sound broke the stillness of the night, and presently they began to ask one another :

“Who gave the alarm ? What’s it all about ?”

Maclellan was very sceptical about its being Indians. He did not believe they would attempt an attack after what they had already suffered.

“Come on, some of you,” he said ; “ Normie will show us where he saw the Indians, and we’ll have a good look around.”

They accordingly went to the spot, and after hunting about a little Maclellan called out :

“Here we are ! Here’s Normie’s Indian ! Who wants the scalp ?”

They all ran up to him, and great was their amusement on discovering that the "Indian" was a poor little coyote shot through the heart.

The shower of chaff that Norman then had to stand tried his self-control sorely; but he managed to hold his tongue, and Maclellan comforted him by saying in his kindly way :

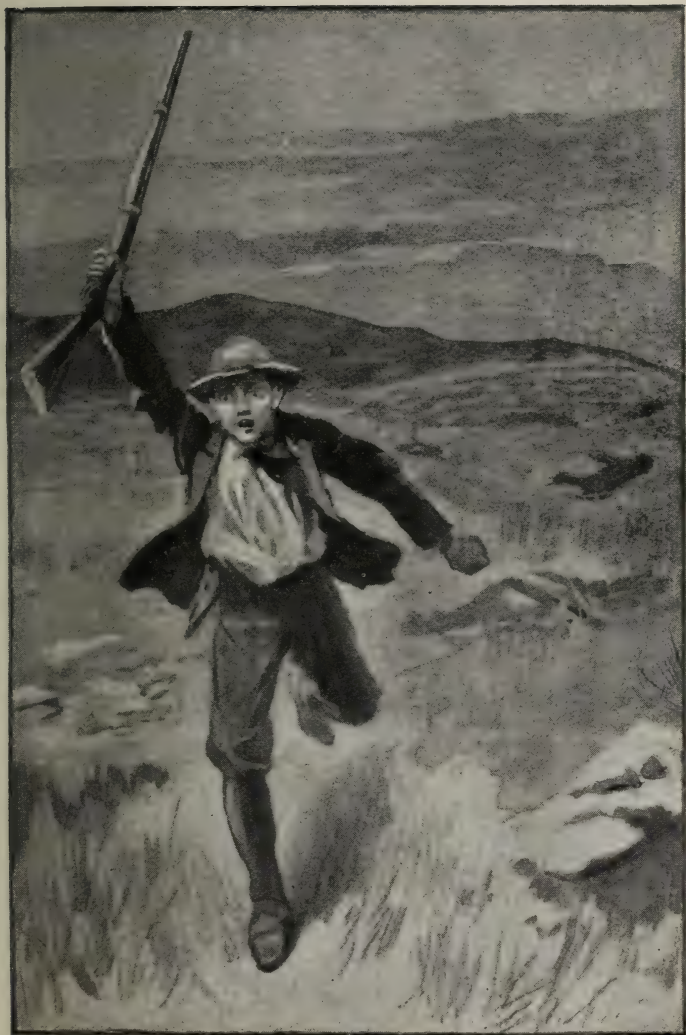
"Say, you fellows, just shut up. If I'd let you get as full of whiskey as you wanted to, the varmints might have come and scalped you all before you'd a-known what they were about. You may be mighty thankful there's one sober fellow in the crowd, any way."

No less consoling was Jack Butler, who said :

"They've got no cause to laugh at you, Norm. It takes a pretty good shot to hit a coyote in daytime, let alone putting a bullet into him at night. They couldn't do it themselves for the life of them."

After the episode of the cañon the Indians gave the miners no trouble for a while, and the boundary-line was crossed in good order a little to the west of the Okonagan River.

"Here we are in the land of gold!" shouted Maclellan jubilantly. "May every man of us get his share!" to which sentiment there was of course a hearty chorus of assent.



"THE INDIANS! THE INDIANS! GET READY!"

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"But, mates," he continued, "we're a long way from the diggings yet. We've lots of teaming and tramping still ahead of us. However, we've got this far all right, barring the poor chaps those rascally redskins done for, and I reckon we'll finish the journey before snowfall. But we've got to stick to it right along. No loafin' or shirkin'."

This last bit of counsel was aimed at Andy Smith, who had of late been showing a disposition to protest against the energy of the leaders, and to prefer a slower rate of progress.

He did this more to run counter to Maclellan than because he was lazy, and, as may be supposed, had little difficulty in finding imitators, so that there had come to be two parties in the camp.

Maclellan thoroughly understood this, and would have been very glad to part company with Smith and his sympathisers altogether; but for the present, any way, this was not advisable.

They were still liable to attack from the Indians, and needed to keep together. In union lay their strength; so he kept back the hot words he was often tempted to speak, and with remarkable self-control was as pleasant

towards the obstructionists as if he saw nothing of their provoking conduct.

After crossing the border, the gold-hunters made good progress towards the Okonagan Lake, and, being left in peace for a number of days, were congratulating themselves that the Indians had got tired of interfering with them, when they were rudely awakened out of their delusion.

Beside their horses, the company had a number of oxen, which were used to haul the heavy waggons.

These, of course, were turned loose to graze as soon as the halt for the night was made, and several mounted men were detailed to keep them from straying too far.

At a place not far south of Lake Okonagan camp had been made rather earlier than usual owing to the animals being very tired, and when they were released from their labours they wandered away a good distance from the waggons in search of grass and water.

Norman was among those in charge of them, and it happened that he was very tired also, for he had had a heavy day of it, his team, for some reason, having been most aggravatingly fractious.

It is not easy to be on the alert when you

are thoroughly weary, and Norman was almost dozing in his saddle as his horse followed the herd of slow-moving oxen, when suddenly the peace and quietness of the scene were broken in upon by a most startling intrusion.

The camp had been made in a kind of meadow surrounded by low hills, and from behind these hills there issued fully a hundred mounted Indians, who charged down upon the gold-hunters' stock with the evident intention of separating the animals from their owners, and driving them off to their own fastnesses.

CHAPTER VII.

BAD INDIANS AND GOOD.

So suddenly did the Indians appear that they had made good progress towards their coveted prey ere the guardians thereof fully realised the situation.

Then there went up from them a frantic chorus of shouts punctuated by rifle reports, and, lustily galloping in between the advancing foe and the stock, they sought to set the latter in motion towards the camp.

But the slow-witted oxen did not understand why they should be thus disturbed in their comfortable grazing, and were so loth to leave it that the few herders could make little impression upon them.

Norman got into a fury of excitement. He charged his horse almost viciously against the oxen, crying :

“Off with you, you stupid brutes! Get a move on, will you?”

The other riders were no less urgent, and at last the herd started off at a lumbering gallop.

But by this time the Indians were close up, and showing an unusual degree of daring in their determination to effect their purpose.

So overwhelming were their numbers that it would have been utter folly for Norman and his companions to attempt to withstand them.

Their only safety lay in keeping the oxen between them and their foes, while they strove to work the now frightened creatures towards the waggons.

For some minutes the success of the Indians' clever strategy seemed assured, and had the horses of the party been grazing with the oxen, it certainly would have succeeded.

Happily, however, it was Maclellan's practice to have the animals kept apart wherever there was sufficient grazing-ground, and the present emergency amply illustrated the wisdom of the plan.

He had been the first himself in the camp to discover the perilous plight of the oxen,

and, shouting to the others, "Get your horses! Get your horses! The reds are after our stock!" he rushed for his horse, which was picketed near by.

His example was quickly imitated, and in a wonderfully short space of time three score armed horsemen were dashing across the plain, shouting with the full force of their lungs.

Ahead of all rode Maclellan on the Terror, whose great strides fairly devoured the ground, and Norman's heart leaped for joy as he saw him approaching.

"Hurrah!" he panted. "There comes Maclellan! I guess the Indians won't wait for him to get up to them."

Nor did they. Realising that they could not drive the tardy oxen into the hills before their owners would be upon them, they gave up their attempted raid, and suddenly withdrew, the whole affair passing off without loss of life on either side.

"The varmints came mighty near doing us up this time," said Maclellan, with a big sigh of relief when all was over. "If they'd got our cattle they'd have crippled us badly. We'll have to keep more out on guard when the critters are grazing. It won't do

to take any chances of their being raided in that fashion."

But the Indians now seemed to despair of opposing the gold-hunters in force, and no further concerted attack was made upon them, although the rascals dogged their path all the way to the Thompson River with thievish intent, and succeeded in doing considerable petty damage.

The river was reached at Kamloops, a post of the Hudson Bay Company, beautifully situated in the delta formed by the junction of the North River with the Thompson.

Both were large streams, exceeding three hundred yards in width, and the fruit of their union was Kamloops Lake, at the head of which stood the fort.

After the rugged and difficult country through which they had passed, the region round about Kamloops seemed to the gold-hunters a veritable Paradise, and they were not long in deciding to take a good rest there before proceeding farther.

Norman heartily approved of this decision. There would be easy times for him until they should start again, and he was just in the humour to enjoy a little idling.

The Shuswap Indians, into whose domain they had now come, were thoroughly friendly. The animals could be turned out to graze on the rich alluvial plain without fear of being raided, and there was really nothing for him to do but to enjoy himself as he might see fit.

He was first interested in the Hudson Bay Company's establishment. Although not a very imposing affair it was a novelty to him, and he studied it thoroughly.

A square of about one hundred yards had been enclosed with stout logs driven solidly into the ground, and rising above it to the height of twenty feet. At two of the corners quite imposing bastions had been reared sufficiently high to enable the garrison therefrom to command all the approaches to the fort. In the gallery of the bastions half a dozen small cannon, six-pounders most of them, were mounted, their black muzzles pointing outward, and affording an argument against attack to which the most audacious Indians could hardly fail to pay respectful attention.

Inside the enclosure were a number of houses, the largest one being the officers' quarters, while others afforded accommodation

for the trappers, *voyageurs*, and *employés* at the post, or for the trading-store and fur depôt.

Peaceful and secure as everything seemed about Fort Kamloops when the gold-hunters came to it, there had been times in its history when it was the centre of fierce and deadly fighting, not only with the Indians, but with that great rival of the Hudson Bay's, the North-West Fur Company.

Mr. Maclean, the factor in charge, noticing Norman's interest, told him some thrilling tales of the exciting days, which made a great impression on the boy, and led him to think that it must have been a fine thing then to belong to the renowned Hudson Bay Company.

The day after their arrival at Kamloops, Maclellan and a number of others, Norman among them, went across the North River to pay a visit to the Shuswap settlement, whose chief was reported to be a very notable personage.

They were somewhat surprised to find that the Indian village consisted of a number of substantial wooden buildings, with huge rafters and smoothly planked sides, that were

totally unlike anything they had seen in their own country.

"Why, these fellows must be first-class carpenters!" Maclellan exclaimed, as he looked from house to house, and saw that they were all equally well built; "and just see the dandy way they finish their cross-beams," he went on, pointing to the ends of the rafters, which projected several feet beyond the wall, and were ornamented with the heads of animals or fishes, these representing the totem or family crest of the owners.

In the largest building they found the Shuswap chief lying upon a mattress on the floor.

He had evidently once been a very handsome man, but sickness and suffering had wasted his features, and given him a strange wild look that rather startled Norman.

But his name was reassuring enough, the Hudson Bay people having called him St. Paul, which was perhaps their idea of a convenient abbreviation for Jean Baptiste Dolo, as the Roman Catholic priests had previously named him.

Paul, although an invalid, held unquestioned sway over his tribe, and the factor of the fort

said that he had on many occasions rendered good service to the Company when trouble seemed imminent.

Tea having been offered to the visitors, and pipes being lighted, a general conversation was soon in full swing, to which Norman listened eagerly. His only knowledge of Indians having been gained from those who were in constant hostility to the white men, and consequently mostly shot at sight, it was a very novel experience this, enjoying a peaceful cup of tea in a well-built house, with a full-blooded Indian as his host.

The attitude of enmity or contempt he had hitherto held towards the red men underwent considerable modification as the result of this visit. He was awakened to the fact that all Indians were not bad Indians, and was made to doubt the general truth of the Western saying that the only good Indian is a dead one.

After the tea had been passed round, and partaken of by the visitors, the chief called in his wife and daughters, and introduced them with no less pride than dignity.

They were certainly fine-looking women, who had evidently been spared the heavy tasks that fell to the lot of their humbler sisters, and

Norman, who had a keen appreciation of feminine beauty, amused himself by thinking that a little flirtation with the younger daughter might be a very pleasant way of whiling away the time.

But as he knew no more of the Shuswap tongue than she did of the English, conversation must have languished between them.

The expedition could hardly have chosen a better time for visiting Kamloops, and each day of their stay was full of interest.

On the morning after the visit to the Shuswaps, Mr. Maclean announced that the annual round-up of the horses was about to take place, and that all who wished could join in the fun.

Norman, as a matter of course, volunteered at once, and Maclellan said he might have one of his horses, as Smith curtly refused to allow him to use any of the team.

It was a superb morning, and in high spirits the band of riders set off, the Hudson Bay men greatly pleased at having so much company, and thoroughly enjoying their position of temporary importance, for of course the visitors had to act according to their directions.

The horses, which numbered several hundreds, were in bands scattered throughout the length of the valley, each band being under the rule of two or perhaps three stallions, and kept in wonderful discipline by their haughty masters.

So sagacious were these leaders that the horsemen must needs conceal their purpose until they had their game pretty well surrounded, else, taking fright, they would have dashed off into the bush, whence it would have been a troublesome task to gather them again.

Accordingly, dividing into two parties, they rode off in single file, and at intervals of a hundred yards, the lines ever spreading wider until they practically embraced the valley, and included all the bands of horses.

Then began the drive towards the corrals, of which there were two large ones near the fort.

Moving slowly at first so as not to alarm the horses too soon, the riders drew closer, until they formed a semicircle that completely cut off retreat.

Then the excitement really began. Throwing off all restraint they shouted at the

top of their voices, and drove their spurs in deep as they charged upon the startled bands.

At first the stallions joined in the wild stampede that ensued. Then, as if ashamed of their cowardice, they halted and, turning about, gallantly showed fight while their companions were fleeing for safety.

Norman was so completely carried away by the excitement of the riotous charge that he did not at first observe this change of front, and ere he fully realised it was right upon a fine black stallion with a big white star in his forehead, who rushed at him with open mouth.

Well was it for him indeed that he rode like a centaur, else he would certainly have been knocked from his saddle and perhaps trampled to death under the hoofs of the infuriated creature.

Not an instant too soon he saw his danger, and by a sudden swift curvet put his own horse's head in the way, and the stallion's teeth buried themselves harmlessly upon the other's forelock.

The shock of the collision brought both animals to a standstill, and, before Norman could put his horse in motion again, the stallion

had reared and struck at him viciously with his forefeet.

Fortunately they were unshod, and the hoofs had been worn smooth by long use; but, notwithstanding this, Norman suffered a painful blow in the calf of his right leg, and his horse was severely struck in the fore-quarter.

Realising that it would no longer do to act upon the defensive only, Norman suddenly drove his horse hard against the stallion, at the same time bringing the long whip he held down upon the wicked brute's flank with all his might.

Thus doubly assailed, the big black fellow stumbled backwards, stood for a moment trembling all over, and then with a piercing neigh of mingled pain and terror galloped after the mares, leaving Norman master of the field.

When, amid unlimited shouting and cracking of whips, all the bands had been safely corraled, a number of young horses suitable for breaking in were selected and separated.

Then the old mares that seemed unfit for further duty were weeded out and set by themselves.

"What are you going to do with them

now?" Norman asked one of the Hudson's Bay men. "They're not good for anything, are they?"

"You bet they are," was the prompt response. "We're going to eat them."

"To eat them!" exclaimed Norman. "Get out! You're trying to fool me."

"Not a bit of it," answered the man. "We kill them now when they're fattest, and salt them down, and that's the only meat we have most of the time through the winter."

Norman was too polite to express the repugnance he felt to the idea of eating horses. He had never thought of them in that connection, and he quite pitied the Hudson's Bay men for having to be content with such fare.

Besides, it seemed to him a sorry and degrading ending to the life of usefulness which these animals had lived.

Another interesting event of the gold-hunter's stay at Kamloops was the arrival of the annual Fur Brigade from the east and the north, bringing with them the precious peltries obtained by barter from the Indians, or by their own skill as hunters and trappers.

It was certainly a very picturesque if not elegant or impressive cavalcade that came down the valley, every member of it mounted,

and leading one or more pack animals whose backs bore heavy bales of fur.

One-third of the men were whites, *employés* of the Company, the remainder being half-breeds or full Indians, and they all had the wild, unkempt look of those who have little to do with the refinements and restraints of civilised life.

In their presence Mr. Maclean and those with him at the fort, hitherto much to be considered, suffered complete eclipse in Norman's eyes, and he gave his whole attention to the newcomers.

There was no difficulty in scraping acquaintance with them, and he soon had established himself upon a friendly footing.

He did not fail to draw from them some of their exciting experiences when, away at their far-distant lonely posts, they hunted the cinnamon, the silver-tip, and other species of grizzly, or pitted their own craft and cunning against those of the merciless mountain lion.

"If I don't make a good strike at the diggings before I'm a couple of years older, I shouldn't wonder if I'd be asking your Company for a job," he said to Mr. Maclean one evening.

“Well, my boy, we’d be very glad to have you in our service,” was the factor’s response, “and I’m free to say that there are a good many worse ways of doing for yourself. For my part I’m in no great hurry to swap places with the most of the gold-miners I’ve seen.”

CHAPTER VIII.

A CAMP-FIRE YARN.

AT Kamloops, the company, which had hitherto kept together so well, broke up, for the members were not all of one mind as to the best districts into which to go in quest of the gold they sought.

Some, therefore, continued on to the Cariboo region, others turned southward, having the gold-bars of the Fraser River in view, and others still went east into the little-known country there, having confidence in themselves to find new diggings equal to or perhaps better than anything yet discovered.

Of the three divisions Andy Smith joined the one going to the Cariboo, and Norman of course went with him.

As Maclellan decided to try the Fraser district, this meant that Norman must part company with him, and the boy felt the separation keenly.

The burly leader had been his best friend amongst the gold-hunters, and right glad would both of them have been could Norman be transferred to his employ.

But Andy Smith, more out of sheer ugliness of disposition than because he valued Norman's services so highly, refused to release him, and both Norman and Maclellan had too high a sense of honour to join in taking the law into their own hands.

"I'm mighty sorry the old hunker won't let you go," said Maclellan. "But you're bound to stay with him until he does, unless, of course, he ain't doin' the square thing by you, and then you'll have no call to stay. But just you keep a stiff upper lip, my boy, and you'll come out all right, never fear. You've got plenty of the right stuff in you."

Norman found it hard to keep back the tears when Maclellan thus parted with him, for there seemed small chance of their ever meeting again.

"You've been real good to me, sir," he said with some difficulty, owing to the big lump in his throat, "and I do wish I was going with *you*!" and then, slipping up to the Terror, he patted the horse's neck lovingly,

and buried his face in his mane to hide his emotion.

Andy Smith disposed of his waggon at Kamloops, the factor advising him that pack-horses were better suited for the route to Cariboo.

Norman was very glad of this, for it meant a considerable lessening of his work, especially as Smith thought it well to engage a couple of the Shuswaps, who were experienced packers, to act in that capacity, and also as guides.

The party pushing on to the Cariboo district was composed of some fifty gold-hunters, with as many more Indian packers and guides, and the same number of pack animals, thus forming quite an imposing cavalcade.

All danger from Indian attack being over, there was no attempt made at regular organisation. The men formed themselves into groups, according to their own inclinations, and went fast or slow just as they saw fit, so that by the end of a few days they were strung out over the trail to such an extent that the whole of them never camped at the same place.

The Cariboo gold region had not been long

discovered, but at Kamloops they had heard stories of its richness sufficient to fill them with high hopes of finding fortunes ahead.

On the Quesnelle River hundreds of miners were reported to be averaging from two to five pounds per day, and Ferguson's Bar had yielded as much as twelve pounds to the hand per day, while Antler Creek, still farther north, outdid them all.

At this veritable Eldorado new hands were taking out gold to the value of twenty pounds per day! One lucky man was known to have found sixty-four ounces of the precious metal, worth nearly two hundred pounds, in a single day's work! When the bed-rock was laid bare it proved to be so studded with lumps of gold that a shovelful would contain ten pounds' worth. The stuff required no washing, for the nuggets or pellets could be picked out by the hand, one rocker yielding fifty ounces in a forenoon. In three weeks a party of three men had earned sixteen thousand pounds!

Such were the reports (and they were no mere wild tales, but on the whole substantially true) with which the men from Walla Walla were led to attempt and endure the difficulties of the road to Cariboo.

In comparison with these, what they had previously passed were mere child's play.

They found the Cariboo region studded with mountains of great height, closely packed together, and having precipitous sides densely wooded, where they were not so craggy that even a pine could not find root.

Out of the ruck there rose here and there sky-reaching peaks, to which such names as Mount Snow-shoe, Burdett, and Bald Mountain had been given, the latter being so lofty as to reach the line of perpetual snow.

This sea of mountains, for such it would certainly seem to any one looking down upon it from a balloon, was cut into by streams of all sizes, from tiny rivulets to roaring torrents, called by the miners creeks or gulches, which wound round amongst the cañons and valleys to and from every point of the compass, all ultimately finding their way into the Fraser River.

Into the thick of this wild region the gold-hunters plunged, and now Norman had his first real experience of hardship.

There was nothing approaching a road, only a mere trail, and that of the roughest

description, so that the animals were continually slipping and stumbling.

The mules, of which there were many, got on much better than the horses, and Norman, who had hitherto entertained feelings of contempt for the hybrids, now began to regard them with respect.

They were not only more sure-footed than their aristocratic relations, but they showed far keener sense in avoiding danger and in extricating themselves from critical situations, so that more than once Norman was fain to exclaim when one of his charges got into difficulties :

“For the land’s sake I only wish you were a mule, and you wouldn’t be half the bother that you are!”

He even ventured to suggest to Smith that the horses should be exchanged for mules, opportunities of doing which were afforded by meeting with parties returning from the Cariboo, who were quite willing to make a deal, but the only thanks he got was to be gruffly told to mind his own business.

“You’re mighty skeered of havin’ too much to do, ain’t ye?” sneered the miserly curmudgeon. “Well, jest let me tell ye, ye

ain't in fur no picnic with me, so jest peg away, and keep your mouth shut."

Poor Norman! The prospects for any kind of a picnic while in the employ of Andy Smith were certainly small, but with the buoyancy of youth he did not allow this consideration to depress him. Smith would not be always his boss. Some day soon he would be trying his luck for himself, and then—well, he didn't know just what would happen, but he cherished roseate hopes.

Among the party was a young Englishman, whose acquaintance Norman made through rendering him some small service at a timely moment.

His name was rather an imposing one—Shakespeare Johnson to wit—but he himself was one of the warmest-hearted, brave-spirited, genial fellows that ever sought elusive fortune in the wilds of British Columbia.

It was his first trip into the Cariboo district, but he had already been roughing it in the country for a year or two, and had some good stories to tell of his adventures.

Norman found his company very attractive, and as he took quite a fancy to the boy they were a good deal together. One of the stories

he told as they lay by the camp fire at night, weary with their hard day's work, was as follows :

" It was my first trip into the country, and I had for my chum a red-headed Irishman named Dennis Molloy, who was the jolliest kind of company. We each had two pack mules which we drove ourselves, and in spite of precipices, cañons, swamps, and torrents we made good headway. Right in the heart of the mountains we came upon a drover from Oregon, who was taking five hundred head of cattle and a lot of sheep to the Cariboo district, where they could be disposed of at a high profit.

" He was a giant of a man, and as warm-hearted as he was big, and he at once proposed that we should join him, which we were glad enough to do, as he had plenty of fresh meat, and we were desperately sick of our rusty bacon.

" Well, we jogged along comfortably for a couple of days, and then, one morning, it was discovered that some two score of the driver's cattle were missing, having evidently been carried off by thieves. Two of our mules had also disappeared.

" This was a serious matter, and all thought

of proceeding farther was given up until the mystery should be solved.

“To help him with the cattle, the drover, whose name was Matt Carpenter, had several Mexicans, dark-skinned, wild-eyed fellows, who looked quite capable of stealing the whole drove themselves if they got the chance.

“But he put full confidence in them, and, as it turned out, it was through one of them that the cattle were recovered.

“This ‘greaser,’ as Carpenter called him, took them up to the top of a hill near by, and, after carefully surveying the extensive landscape, pointed to a break in the chain of mountains to the eastward, and declared that the cattle-thieves had gone that way.

“Carpenter’s idea was different, but he accepted the Mexican’s, and we set about finding the shortest and quickest route to the gap.

“We had a rough time of it, scrambling over fallen timber, and picking our way along the dry bed of a watercourse, so that we could not make anything like the speed we wished.

“At last we came to a sort of tableland, in whose soft soil the tracks of the stolen

cattle were very plain, and our spirits rose at the prospect of soon coming up with them.

“There were four of us—Carpenter, Juan the greaser, Dennis, and myself—the drover carrying a long, heavy rifle, while we each had a good six-shooter and a bowie-knife.

“Having ridden a little ahead of the others, I came to an open piece of grass, on the other side of which I was, to my great surprise, brought to a full stop by a huge chasm some two hundred yards wide, and at least a thousand feet deep.

“This strange split in the tableland continued, deepening and widening as it went, until it reached the foot of the valley. Near its mouth, about two miles away, I thought I detected a tiny wreath of blue smoke.

“‘Ah, ha!’ I exclaimed; ‘somebody’s got a fire there. Maybe it’s the very rascals we’re after.’

“Accordingly I made my way cautiously along, skirting the side of the precipice, until, having dismounted and crept to the edge, I could peer into the ravine below.

“‘Hurrah!’ I murmured; ‘I’ve got them!’ for there were the driver’s cattle and our mules snugly herded, while three of the worst-

looking ruffians I ever set eyes on were busy cooking their supper.

“Hurrying back to my companions, who had gone in another direction, I told them of my discovery.

“The plan of campaign was promptly settled. Securing our horses we proceeded with the greatest caution along the side of the hill, keeping a sharp look-out for any sentinel.

“As we got near the mouth of the valley in which the thieves were hidden, Carpenter pointed out the figure of a man moving stealthily through the trees.

“‘You stay right here now,’ he whispered; ‘I’ll take care of that fellow.’

“We watched him breathlessly as he approached his enemy with true trapper’s skill, crawling like a great snake along the ground, dragging his rifle after him, or dodging from one tree to another.

“In this manner he succeeded in getting within easy range before his proximity was suspected, and then the report of his rifle rang out ere the cattle-thief’s revolver had time to crack, and its rascally owner fell headlong with a bullet in his brain.

“We three at once dashed forward, and

covered the other scoundrels with our revolvers ere they realised what had happened.

"They didn't dare show fight, and in a trice we had them securely bound, and at our mercy.

"Carpenter was vastly pleased at our success, particularly as none of the cattle were missing or injured.

"We were at first a little at a loss to know what to do with our prisoners, but finally decided to take them with us as far as William's Lake, where a district judge exercised authority; and this we did, tying them on to their own horses, and keeping them closely watched day and night until they were turned over to the custody of the law, and, as we afterwards learned to our great satisfaction, were sentenced to fourteen years in the chain-gang."

Norman voted this a good story, saying, "That's the way to do with such rascals. We had our own little scrapes with the Indians as we came through"; and then he proceeded to tell the story of the passage of the cañon in return for Johnson's yarn.

As the party approached the Quesnelle River they met many returning miners, who had doleful tales of the hardships of the dig-

ging, the frequent rains, the spongy soil, and consequent wet-sinking, and the enormous prices of everything, winding up, where the recital came from one who had failed "to strike pay-dirt," with the assurance that they had better go no farther, but turn back at once, or they would starve, or at least have to beg their way back.

But none of these things moved them. They were bound to find them out for themselves, and their hopes were from time to time given a fillip by meeting a man going down with a suspiciously heavy pack, which he guarded with much more solicitude than if it had contained only flour and bacon.

From the crossing of the Quesnelle to William's Creek the objective point of their journey was only sixty miles, but they were terrible miles! Each one of them seemed not less than ten miles long.

The trail led through a perfect sea of mud with only the interlacing roots of trees to give it any solidity, and both men and animals floundered and fell at almost every step.

It was simply frightful work. The men grumbled; the mules kicked, and bit, and balked, and lay down as if they would die

before they would get up again; the packs were continually working loose; the mosquitoes never ceased from troubling, everybody's face and hands bleeding from their bites; and altogether it was a perfect purgatory.

Andy Smith stormed and treated both Norman and his animals brutally, so that they were alike disheartened and despairing.

Nor was this the worst of it. At Keithley's Creek they had to part with their animals, for no creature but a man would be capable of carrying anything over the remainder of the journey at that season of the year.

On taking stock of their goods the gold-hunters found that they had about one hundred and sixty pounds per man, and as it was out of the question for them to carry more than eighty pounds on their backs at a time, this meant that they must needs do the forty miles still left of their journey twice over.

Poor Norman! All that he had hitherto endured seemed as nothing in comparison with what he had now to undergo.

Smith insisted that he should shoulder as heavy a pack as he himself undertook, and, stout and strong as Norman was, the weight of eighty pounds put a strain upon him far beyond his years.

Yet he manfully strove to carry it, despite the fearful character of the trail, which crawled along the sides of mountains that were soaked with melting snow and drizzling rain, or across swamps where tangled tree-roots afforded the only semblance of footing, or skirted precipices where a single slip would have meant destruction.

What made matters even worse was his employer's utter lack of consideration. He treated him as though he were one of his mules, assailing him with coarse abuse whenever he faltered under his excessive burdens.

There were of course those that pitied Norman, and would have lightened his load if they could; but each man had his own work to do, and it took all his strength and energy to do it.

One day, when they were making the second trip over the trail, Norman fairly collapsed, and sank down in the mud with a groan of despair.

Andy Smith, who was just ahead of him, at once turned back, and with a horrid oath commanded him to get up and go on.

"I can't," pleaded Norman. "I'm done out. Give me a chance to rest."

"Give you a chance to rest!" shouted Smith

angrily. "This is what I'll give you," and rushing at Norman he was just about to let him have a brutal kick from his heavy boot, when a mighty blow from a hard-clenched fist caught him behind the ear, and he pitched over into the mire with a great splash.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DIGGINGS AT WILLIAM S CREEK.

WHEN Andy Smith recovered his senses he found Shakespeare Johnson standing over him, looking the very incarnation of righteous anger and contempt.

“You great hulking coward!” he cried, with a menacing movement of his own foot, just as if it were itching to follow the example set by his fist. “You miserable hound, you!” he continued, fairly panting out the words in the intensity of his wrath. “Just let me see you try any games of that kind again, and I’ll thrash you within an inch of your life.”

Now Andy Smith was a bully and a coward, but he was no fool, and although his blood was boiling with rage, and every nerve in his body tingling with pain, he still had sufficient command over himself not to attempt

at that moment any reprisal for the indignity he had suffered.

Not only was Johnson his equal in size and strength, but he was fully ten years younger, and had on previous occasions displayed a mastery of the art of self-defence that caused him to be profoundly respected by the entire company.

Instead, therefore, of returning the blow, Smith contented himself with swearing horribly at the other for interfering in what was none of his business.

"It is my business," retorted Johnson, still keeping his fists clenched, so that he might enforce the argument if necessary. "I'll not stand by and let any man be such a brute if I can help it; and, what's more," he added, "I'm just going to keep my eye on you, and if you don't treat this young chap fair and square, you'll be given a necktie-party some fine night, just as sure as that you're the meanest rascal out of gaol."

Smith gave a snarl like that of a trapped wolf, and, re-shouldering his pack, went on without another word, while Johnson helped Norman to his feet, and received his fervent thanks with a deprecating smile.

"Tut, my boy! that's nothing; I was only

too glad of the chance to have a crack at the skunk, and I got in a fine one," he went on gleefully. "Look at my fist," holding out his right hand for Norman to inspect.

The knuckles were red and bruised, as though they had been in contact with a barndoor, and Norman gave a whistle of astonishment.

"It must have been a corker, and no mistake!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "I wonder will he try and get even with you for it?"

"Oh, I can take care of myself all right," responded Johnson jauntily; "and, mark my words, he'll not be so hard on you after this."

This expectation of Norman's champion turned out to be correct.

Smith now realised that he was closely watched, besides being disliked by all, and not caring to risk the possibility of being made chief actor at a "necktie-party," he maintained towards Norman an attitude of sullen silence, except when it was necessary to give him some instructions.

At length, after several days of terrible toil, the whole party, with their goods, reached William's Creek, and settled down for a

good rest ere taking up the business of gold-hunting.

The diggings at this place reminded Norman very strongly of one of those big ant-heaps that he used to be cruel and thoughtless enough to kick open when he was a small boy.

For two or three miles down the creek all the available ground was taken up, and a multitude of mud-stained men were grubbing in the mire, as if their lives depended upon getting in as deep as possible.

The unoffending stream had been treated in the most inconsiderate manner. A little above the settlement it was strong, clear, and silvery, but soon inroads had been made upon its volume, in the shape of ditches cut from it, and continued along the hillsides to feed the huge over-shot wheels that abounded.

Then its course became diverted into half a dozen different channels, which were varied every now and then as the miners sought to work the surface they formerly covered, while at intervals dirty streams were poured forth by the sluices, in which the earth dug up was being washed by the water; and finally the poor ill-treated stream was insulted by being shut up for some hundreds of yards in a huge wooden trough, called a "flume."

On the other side of the valley was a heterogeneous collection of smaller flumes, carrying water to the different diggings, and supported at various heights from the ground by straddling props; and all about the apparently hopeless confusion lay windlasses, water-wheels, great banks of "tailings" (the refuse earth washed through the sluices), and the miserable little log-huts of the miners.

As for the town itself, it was composed of the usual collection of rough wooden shanties, stores, eating-places, grog-shops, and gambling-saloons, the latter two seeming to be in the majority.

Standing somewhat apart on a slight eminence was a more comfortable-looking dwelling, above which waved the British flag.

"Whose house is that?" Norman inquired of Shakespeare Johnson; "and what is the flag for?"

"That's the residence of the Gold Commissioner," Johnson replied, with a perceptible note of pride in his voice. "He's the biggest man in these parts, and although he's only got a couple of policemen to back him up, there's not a man dare jump a claim, or hook another fellow's dust, where the Commissioner

can get after him. I'll take you up to see him some time."

Norman gazed at the house and the flag it bore with feelings of deep respect. That flag meant fair play for all; and if he ever was lucky enough to make a good strike on his own account, he would look to it for the protection of his rights and he would not look in vain. It was the cheering symbol of British justice.

In and out of the vast ant-heaps the human ants wriggled night and day, for in the method of mining here in vogue, known as wet-sinking, the labour must be kept up without ceasing all through the twenty-four hours.

It was a strange sight at night when, looking down the creek, one could see the little fires at the mouth of each shaft, and the twinkling lanterns, with the dim, ghost-like figures gliding to and fro through the light and shadow, while here and there the huts were brightly illuminated.

The one idea of the people of William's Creek was work. Only around the bar-rooms and in the saloons might a few idlers be found. How, indeed, could it be otherwise, where wages were from two to three pounds a day, and flour retailed at six shillings a pound?

The variety of noises was as remarkable as that of objects. From the hills above came the perpetual thudding of axes biting their remorseless way into the tree-trunks, intermingling with the crash of falling trees, and the grating undertone of the saws as they sliced the logs into planks and beams.

Up from the bottom of the valley rose the splashing and creaking of water-wheels, the grating of shovels, the din of the blacksmiths' sledges, and the ceaseless shouting of the men at the tops of the shafts to those below as the emptied buckets were returned by the windlasses.

Norman and Shakespeare Johnson were gazing at all this the morning after their arrival, when they were approached by a man, the oddity of whose appearance would have created a sensation if he had shown himself in the streets of an Eastern city.

An old blue shirt, sadly faded, and a pair of trousers ingeniously contrived out of discarded flour-sacks, with the lettering and trade-marks still visible, covered his body in some sort of fashion. On his head was an ancient felt hat, so badly battered that his grizzled hair showed through the holes, while his big splay feet were encased in a pair of

huge gum-boots that came up to his thighs, and fastened at his waist. One of them unfortunately had a hole in it, and was thereby rendered useless for the very purpose which made it worth wearing, but as the owner had no other footgear he could not discard it.

"I calculate you've just struck these parts," he said, with the patronising air of one who was an old resident.

"Yes," replied Johnson pleasantly. "We got in last night. Think there's anything left for us?"

"Well—there's no tellin'," was the dubious response. "You've just got to take your chance. There's the Adam's claim," he continued, pointing it out with his long bony finger. "They took five hundred ounces out thar yesterday; and that un with the shed over the shaft (guess they're afeard of ketchin' cold), that's the Steele claim, good for a hundred ounces a day or tharabouts; and away down thar by the cañon you see the Black Jack tunnel—I reckon *they're* goin' to strike it pretty rich."

"And what are all these other shafts around us?—aren't they taking out gold?" Johnson inquired.

"Waal, no; yer see, they're all after it

mighty smart, but there ain't many of 'em as'll strike it, I don't think, for the pay streak don't run wide, and if one hits it the other five or six on each side of him can't get it nohow."

This, indeed, was just what had happened in the case of the discoverer of these diggings—Dutch William, the man after whom the creek was called.

He had crossed the Bald Mountain alone with his blankets, provisions, and prospecting tools on his back. On seeing the creek (which ultimately produced more gold than any diggings of the same extent in the world), he hastened back for help, and with the aid of a few companions sank a shaft, at the foot of which they struck the "pay streak," a stratum of blue clayey gravel, rich with gold.

When their provisions gave out and they went back for more they were followed, and presently a perfect stampede to the new diggings ensued. The ground all about their claim was speedily taken up, and immense fortunes were realised. But, unfortunately for Dutch William and his mates, the claim they had staked out contained only a narrow portion of the lead, which was soon exhausted, and in the following winter a subscription had

to be raised to enable the ill-starred discoverer to leave the country.

But neither Norman nor Johnson was going to be discouraged by anybody else's lack of success. They were both young and full of life, as well as of confidence in themselves.

For a couple of days Norman saw little of Andy Smith, who was busily engaged in seeking a spot in which to try his fortune.

Presently he announced that he had made up his mind where to go, and the next morning he set off with Norman as his sole companion.

Heavy laden as they were with blankets, provisions, picks, and shovels, they had a hard, toilsome time of it crossing Bald Mountain, on whose other side lay Ace of Spades Creek, which Smith had decided to prospect.

Having followed the course of the creek for some miles, they halted at a spot that seemed the most promising.

"Here we are now," said Smith, dropping his pack, with a grunt of relief, an action that Norman, whose shoulder ached fearfully, was glad to imitate. "We'll just see if there's anything to be got out of this place."

"But aren't you going to have somebody else to help you?" Norman asked in a tone of dismay, as he looked around and realised what an immense amount would have to be done if their claim was to be worked in the same fashion as those at William's Creek.

"Jest you mind yer own business, will ye?" snarled Smith. "If I want any more help I'll get it without askin' your advice."

Poor Norman! The prospect of cheerful companionship was far from reassuring, and he heartily wished himself back with Maclellan, or even with his new friend Johnson.

But such regrets were vain, and, hoping for the best, he resolved to keep his own counsel, even though it meant his maintaining unbroken silence, hard as that would be for a boy of his age.

They toiled away for several days without accomplishing anything, and then, one morning, Smith said gruffly:

"You just keep close here now, and see there's no jumpin' of this claim. I'm goin' over to the creek, and I'll be back in a couple of days likely."

Whereupon he strode off without allowing Norman a chance to protest against being thus left alone in the wilderness.

When he was well out of earshot Norman gave vent to his feelings by exclaiming :

" Well, if you're not the meanest old chump that ever stepped ! You've got no more consideration for a fellow than if he were a mule. And so I'm to stay here all alone until you see fit to come back ! A lively time I'll have of it, won't I ? "

At first, to tell the truth, he did not really resent his employer's action as strongly as his words implied, for he was rather glad to be relieved of his hateful presence.

Moreover, while he was away there need be no work done, as one could not do anything alone, and he was therefore free to amuse himself as he pleased.

Naturally enough his first thought was to see if there was not something to be shot in the neighbourhood. He still had his good rifle and revolver, and a brace of grouse or partridge would certainly furnish a most grateful variety to the everlasting bacon.

Accordingly, taking enough food to last him the day, in case he had no luck with his rifle, he set out, saying to himself :

" Now, if I only had a good dog to talk to I'd be happy. Dear old Grip ! I just wish he was here. "

And the remembrance of his favourite hound at home, carrying his mind back to Walla Walla, brought on a sharp attack of home-sickness.

For the moment he regretted leaving the ranch, and a strong conviction came over him that he was fated never to see it and the dear ones there again.

But his buoyant nature soon reasserted itself. His spirits rose again at the thought of winning fortune, if not in Cariboo, then somewhere else in British Columbia, and, throwing off the cloud of depression, he started whistling a lively tune, which he kept up until he suddenly recollected that if he wanted to get any game he must be as silent as possible.

Turning away from the creek he ascended the mountain-side, and then struck off into the valley beyond.

The scenery was very beautiful and grand. Natural meadows extended on either hand from the stream in the centre to where they met the sides of the mountain-ridges, which, clothed with noble spruce and fir-trees, sloped sharply up into the purple distance, the trees gradually lessening in size, and the vegetation growing increasingly scanty, until they alto-

gether vanished in the region of perpetual snow, where naught broke the sameness of the great horizon of blinding whiteness save a few jagged black peaks too steep for the snow to stay upon.

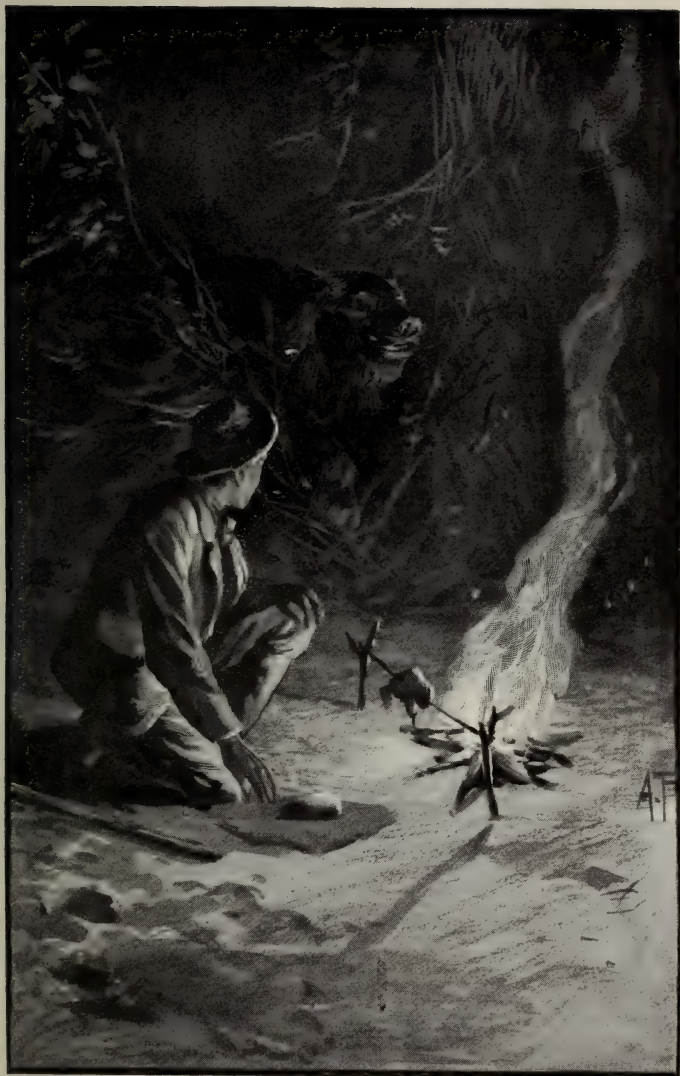
Far away to the eastward, through the clear mountain air, could be seen a stupendous and fantastic mountain-range, showing strange shapes of towers, spires, needle-points, and even faint suggestions of living forms and faces.

But Norman, let it be confessed, had little eye for scenic splendour that morning. He was bent on birds, and his whole attention was given to detecting signs of their presence.

To his great disappointment, however, they seemed remarkably hard to find, and he went on and on through the forest, peering this way and that, ever and anon pausing to listen intently and yet discovering nothing.

"I'm glad I brought my grub along," he said to himself, "for it looks as if I was going to have a hard time of it finding something to shoot. Where can the birds have gone to?"

It was one thing to ask the question and another to answer it, and midday found him with his bag still empty.



"THERE CAME A RUSTLING IN THE PINE BRANCHES, AND THE NEXT
MOMENT THE FLAMES REVEALED THE FORM OF A HUGE BEAR."

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Having eaten heartily of cold bacon and biscuits, he felt very much inclined for a nap, and, Andy Smith not being on hand to say him nay, he stretched himself out comfortably in the shade, and fell sound asleep.

When he awoke he was horrified to find that the sun had already sunk behind the mountains, and that from the feel of the air it must be quite late in the afternoon.

“My word!” he exclaimed. “Here’s a pretty go. It’ll be dark in a couple of hours, and I can’t get back to our camp inside that time. I guess I’d better stay where I am until morning.”

This was a wise decision, and, having made it, Norman, with his wonted promptitude, set about preparations for the night.

He gathered a big pile of dry wood, pulled a lot of pine-branches for a bed, and then tried again to find a partridge.

This time fortune favoured him. He saw and shot a fine big bird, and, with a good supper thus ensured, felt in much better spirits.

When darkness came he lit his fire, and proceeded to roast his partridge before it, using bacon for basting.

He was thus busily engaged, and the

tempting odour of roast partridge and bacon was scenting the air, when there came a rustling in the pine-branches beside him, and the next moment the leaping flames revealed the shaggy, clumsy form of a huge bear !

CHAPTER X.

A BOUT WITH A BEAR.

NORMAN knew something about bears, although he had never shot one, and it did not take him long to recognise in this unbidden and unwelcome guest a very big silver-tip, the most to be dreaded of the whole grizzly species.

Instinctively he bethought himself of his rifle, but, alas! he had put it in a safe place while doing his cooking, and the bear was standing very near it, the ferocious grin on his grizzled muzzle seeming to indicate that he knew just how clever he was in thus cutting the boy off from his chief weapon of defence.

Of course there was the revolver, but to try to kill this mighty creature with that was to run a fearful risk, for if the first bullet did not reach heart or brain there would assuredly be no chance of trying another.

The situation certainly lacked nothing of

the dramatic—in the midst of the little glade the brightly burning fire at which the partridge sizzled so appetisingly; on one side of the blaze the lonely boy with his hand grasping the weapon he was in doubt whether or not to use, and on the other the huge bear, somewhat bewildered and daunted by the flames, his small cunning eyes blinking irresolutely while his heavy head swung to and fro.

As long as the fire burned strongly, and he could keep it between himself and the bear, Norman knew that he was probably safe from attack, but unfortunately it was already dying down, and the wood he had gathered lay off to one side, so that he must needs get nearer the bear in order to reach it.

“Old Ephraim,” as the trappers have nicknamed the grizzly, now seemed rather to enjoy the situation, apparently feeling so sure of his prey that there was no need to hurry.

While Norman kept still Bruin did likewise, but when the boy made a cautious move towards the pile of wood the big creature gave a threatening growl, and stopped swinging his head to watch him.

“What on earth am I to do?” Norman exclaimed. “If I stay here the fire’ll burn

out, and then the brute will make a jump for me."

As the fire sank lower he grew desperate, and at last, summoning up all his resolution, he made a bold dash for the wood.

As he did so the bear made a dash for him, but Norman, instead of going ahead, checked himself sharply, and dodged backward, still keeping the fire in front of him.

Whereupon the bear lumbered forward, thus opening the way to the rifle he had been covering, and Norman, seeing his opportunity, sprang towards it, his heart giving an exultant bound as his hands closed upon it.

In his eagerness to get at Norman, Bruin went nearer the fire than he intended, and one of his fore-paws came down upon a hot cinder that at once made itself felt.

With a wrathful growl the monster backed precipitately away, holding up his injured paw in a manner that would have been highly amusing if he had been inside a cage, but was not so diverting by any means under the circumstances.

But, although Norman did not laugh, he saw the opportunity for which he had been waiting, and, taking careful aim, fired straight into the grizzly's broad breast.

He had hoped to reach the animal's heart, but the bullet pierced the lungs instead, inflicting a mortal yet not immediately fatal wound.

Giving a terrible roar of mingled pain and rage, the bear charged right across the fire at Norman, forgetting in his fury the burning brands, which again scorched his feet.

But the boy was too quick for him. Within a few yards from where he stood when he fired a great rock rose out of the ground.

It had steep, smooth sides, save at one corner, where a succession of cracks enabled one to gain its summit. Norman had noticed the rock while making preparations to camp, and had climbed it in obedience to the instinct every true boy possesses of getting to the top whenever possible.

The rock was now to serve him in good stead, for, the instant he fired, without waiting to ascertain the effect of his shot, he dropped his rifle, since he would have no time to re-load it, and sprang to this natural citadel, ascending its steep side with the agility of a monkey.

So swift had been his action that he was at the top ere the smoke of the discharge had cleared away, and for a moment or two the bear had absolutely no idea of his whereabouts.

Bruin looked so nonplussed when he brought up at the foot of the rock without finding his antagonist that, in spite of the peril of his position, Norman could not resist smiling.

"Eh, old Ephraim?" he said, under his breath. "You were nicely fooled that time, weren't you? If I can only keep you from getting up this rock I'll be all right now."

After a brief sniffing around, the grizzly struck Norman's track, and the next moment had him located.

Of course he at once reared on his hind paws, and strove to make his way up the rock.

But happily he attacked it on the smooth side, where not even so good a climber as a bear could gain a foothold, and despite his frantic efforts he failed to leave the ground.

Emboldened by this Norman leaned over, and saying tauntingly, "You can't do it, you old scoundrel; you can't do it!" he took careful aim at the monster's right eye, and cleverly extinguished that optic with a bullet.

In intolerable agony the silver-tip threw himself down, rubbing his paws against his head, as though he would thereby banish the pain that tortured him.

Just then the last ray of light from the fire flashed out, leaving only a bed of red cinders, and Norman found himself in utter darkness.

"Oh!" he gasped, "what shall I do now? I shan't be able to see him until he's right on me."

Throwing himself flat upon the rock, he listened with bated breath and wildly beating heart for the bear's advance.

He could hear the creature flinging himself about in a vain effort to ease his suffering, and he expected every moment that he would cease this and resume his endeavour to scale the rock.

Yet the time went by without his drawing any nearer, and presently there came a silence that Norman could not understand.

The grizzly had not gone, for he could hear his deep, laboured breathing. What was he doing? Was he evolving out of his crafty brain some new plan of assault, or was he simply resting in order to return to the attack with greater vigour?

"If it was only light enough to see him," Norman groaned, "I believe I could finish him with another shot."

But so intense was the darkness that he

could not locate the now motionless animal with sufficient precision to justify firing again, since if the bullet failed to reach a vital part it would only rouse the brute to further fury.

The hours of the night dragged slowly by. Never did Norman feel them so long, but at last the dawn began to creep across the sky.

All this time the bear had not stirred, and Norman was approaching the comforting conclusion that he must be dead.

When at length the daylight had come it revealed the huge form of the bear lying at the foot of the rock, already stiffening in death.

The bullet through the lungs had done its work, and Norman could boast of having killed one of the biggest silver-tips ever seen in that part of the country.

He was a sorely tired and hungry boy when he descended from his refuge, and however proud he might feel over his exploit, that would not satisfy the importunate demands of his stomach.

Fortunately "Old Ephraim" had not touched the other partridge, nor the remainder of the bacon, and there being plenty of wood

at hand, it was not long ere Norman had a good breakfast broiling at the fire.

Having thus refreshed himself, his next thought was to find his way back to Andy Smith's diggings.

It was not worth his while attempting to do anything with the bear, so, leaving his huge carcase untouched, he set forth, feeling in better spirits than he had for some time past.

He had little difficulty in retracing his steps, and by the middle of the morning was back at the diggings, which, to his considerable disappointment—for he was burning to tell of his success with the bear—he found still deserted and silent.

Being very tired, he made himself a good bed with pine-boughs and blankets, and went off into a sound sleep, from which, after what seemed to him only a few minutes, but was in reality several hours, he was awakened by a brutal kick in the back, and the voice that he hated above all others saying gruffly :

“Get up there, you slug! Can't you do anything better than snooze like that?”

Angered and humiliated, yet realising the futility and folly of any retort in kind, Norman rose and set about making a fire, knowing

well that his employer's first demand would be for something to eat.

Andy Smith had brought back two other men, and as Norman moved about at his work he scrutinised them closely.

The result was far from reassuring. They both seemed, if anything, more ill-favoured than Smith himself.

One was a big clumsy chap with bullet head and bloodshot eyes, who looked capable of any crime, and the other a fox-faced man of medium height, who might be safely matched to outwit and get the best of his mate, in spite of the great difference in their size and strength.

The big fellow Smith called Mike and his companion Jake, the one being an Irishman whose family name was Cregan, and the other a New Englander whose full name was Jedekiah Henson. They both had the same plan of life—namely, to get the most they could for themselves without any regard to the rights or feelings of others.

They had brought with them a good supply of provisions, and were also well furnished with picks, shovels, axes, and other tools. Evidently Smith had plenty of faith in his claim, and believed it quite rich enough to divide with partners.

"But if they don't keep a sharp eye on him he'll do them out of their share, as sure as they've got noses on their faces," said Norman to himself—an opinion, as it happened, that he was not alone in holding, for each member of this precious trio was quite prepared to play the traitor upon the other two if there was anything to be gained by it. In the meantime they would hold together as long as that was absolutely necessary.

They were all good workers, and they set about developing their claim promptly and energetically.

Jake went to the woods to get out timber. Mike undertook the digging of a ditch along the side of the hill, to bring water power into play, while Andy Smith, assisted by Norman, proceeded to sink a shaft down to the pay-streak.

They toiled tremendously, but ill-luck followed them with strange persistence.

The shaft had been dug to a depth of about forty feet when one night a freshet came roaring down the creek and swamped the shaft, filling it to the brim with mud and *débris*.

Smith and his partners were thrown into a paroxysm of rage by this most unexpected and disastrous event, but no amount of profanity

would clear the shaft. That they must do themselves, whether they liked the job or not.

In very ill-humour they set to work extemporising a sort of baling-out apparatus, somewhat after the pattern of the Egyptian Shadouf, although none of them had ever been on the Nile bank, and they laboured away with this for a couple of days without making much impression on the volume of water filling the shaft.

At last on the third day Mike struck.

"I'll not be after pullin' up another bucketful," he averred, with a string of imprecations. "It's just wastin' time we are. We'll never get the wather out of this hole. Come away now wid ye, and let us start another shaft."

Smith was opposed to the idea, but Jake sided with Mike, and so they overruled him, much to his manifest irritation.

A new shaft was accordingly opened, not far from the first one, and spurred on to even greater exertions by their rebuff, the gold-hunters delved, and hoisted and carried away the heavy soil until once more they were within a few feet of the bed-rock upon which the gold-bearing sand lay.

Some of the sand brought up showed promising signs of "colour," and the hopes

of the resolute miners ran high, when again a freshet burst upon them out of the mountains, due either to a cloud-burst or to a sudden melting of the snows, and again the shaft that had cost so much labour was filled to the brim.

Mike Cregan's fury at this second disaster was something appalling to witness. He raged up and down before the swamped shaft, pouring out appalling blasphemies, until Norman, convinced that he had become little short of insane, thought it well to keep out of his sight, lest he should prove dangerous.

Jake and Andy were not so demonstrative, but they were no less disgusted, and when Mike had cooled down a little they took counsel as to what was to be done.

A whole month's labour had been utterly wasted. Winter was drawing near, when it would be impossible to continue operations, and their provisions were fast giving out, while they had no funds to obtain fresh supplies.

The discussion grew more heated the longer it continued, until at last Mike lost his temper entirely, and proceeded to shower abuse upon Andy, attributing all their ill-fortune to him, for no other reason than

because he was pleased to consider him an "unlucky brute."

Smith was not the man to stand this sort of thing, and promptly retorted in a way that brought Mike's fist smashing down on his nose.

A rough-and-tumble fight forthwith followed, to which Jake and Norman vainly strove to put an end, until the furious combatants paused for lack of breath, and then they were able to interpose.

In spite of the advantage Mike had in size, Smith had proved his match, and neither had anything to boast of in regard to injuries inflicted on the other.

Covered with mud and blood, and with their shirts almost torn off their backs, they glared at each other like beasts of prey, and the long-headed Jake realised that the partnership was at an end, and that there would be no more work done on the claim that season.

With some difficulty a sort of truce was patched up, and the consultation continued with the result that it was decided to leave the claim until spring, and then return to it with a better outfit.

In his heart each one of the precious trio determined that he should manage somehow

to appropriate the claim to himself, and oust the others, but not a hint of this did their ugly countenances betray.

There being no work to be done on the following day, they all, with one exception, allowed themselves to sleep later than usual, and when Andy Smith did turn out he was surprised to find Jake's place empty.

At first he thought he had gone into the woods, perhaps, after partridges or something ; but when Norman, who was getting breakfast ready, called out, " Mr. Smith, the grub's nearly all gone ! There's not more than enough left for to-day," Smith's suspicions were aroused, and on looking round he found that not only had everything belonging to Jake disappeared, but the bulk of the provisions also.

" The rascal ! " he shouted ; " he's cleared out, and taken all he could lay his hands on," and clenching his fists, and grating his teeth, he swore long and loud at his partner's perfidy.

Just at this moment Norman discovered the loss of his beloved rifle, and cried out : " He's taken my rifle and all my ammunition ! "

But neither Andy nor Mike had any sympathy to spare for him. They were too deeply concerned about their own losses, for, acting

apparently upon the principle that he might as well "go the whole hog," so to speak, Jake had helped himself to whatever of their possessions he thought worth taking.

Mike, impetuous and reckless, at once set off in pursuit, but Smith showed his superior sense by refusing to join him. He would have revenge later, but in the meanwhile he would do what he thought wisest under the circumstances.

CHAPTER XI.

A PERILOUS PASSAGE.

NORMAN did not at all relish the idea of being thus left alone with Smith, especially as the latter's temper, at the best of times very far removed from angelic, had been given a veritable wire-edge by his recent experiences.

Yet there was no alternative. He was entirely dependent upon his employer, glad as he would have been to get altogether free of him ; and until he could obtain his release, and find other employment, he must simply stay on.

Smith seemed in no hurry to leave the diggings. He was a good shot with the revolver, and could generally succeed in getting a brace of partridge during the day, and although he always appropriated the choicest portions of the birds for himself,

there was enough left to satisfy Norman's hunger.

But this could not continue very long. The scanty store of flour and bacon was just reaching a vanishing-point, and Norman wondered why they did not set out for William's Creek, the nearest place at which more could be obtained.

His wonder was satisfied one morning in a way he certainly did not expect, when, on waking up, he found that his rascally employer, taking a leaf out of Jake Henson's book, had decamped during the night, carrying off his revolver and every particle of food that had remained.

When the full extent of Andy Smith's infamy revealed itself, Norman, sturdy chap though he was, could not help throwing himself down upon a stump and giving way to tears that were due as much to keen vexation as to self-pity.

"What in the world am I to do now?" he exclaimed, looking about him as though the abandoned working might furnish some answer. "I've not a bit of food, and my rifle and revolver have been stolen from me. It'll take me all of three days to find my way back to William's Creek, and mean-

while how am I to keep from starving to death?"

The situation was indeed a serious one for an inexperienced boy, particularly as the nights were rapidly growing colder, and Jack Frost was already manifesting his presence.

It is true his blankets had been left him, but they were practically all he possessed, save the well-worn clothes on his back.

Had he been sufficiently sure of the way back to William's Creek to make haste over it he would not have been so badly off, for he knew it could not be more than three days' travel distant.

But he had a very hazy idea of the route, and the trail in many places was so faint that only the keen senses of an Indian could have made it out.

However, in reaching the settlement lay his one chance of life, and so, rolling up his blankets, he strapped them on his back, and started off, striving to cheer himself by whistling a merry tune.

Presently he fell to talking to himself after a fashion he had, and the conversation, as may be imagined, bore a very sombre tone.

"Well, well," he soliloquised, "and this is the way I'm making my fortune in the gold

diggings. It'll be a long time before I'll have the face to go back to Walla Walla at this rate. Everything stolen from me but my blankets, and they're not worth stealing. What in the world can I do even if I do get to William's Creek? They'll be knocking off work for the winter soon, and I'll not be able to get a job of any kind. Oh! I wish I'd never come here. If I'd only known what a miserable place it is I'd never have left Walla Walla. If I could only come across Maclellan or Mr. Johnson! But I suppose I'll never see them again."

Such was the depressing current of his thoughts as he plodded on, studying every step of the way lest he should stray from the trail.

All day long he kept on, save for a brief rest now and then, and when night came he tried to cheer himself with the thought that ere another night he would be at William's Creek.

Not a morsel of food had he, nor a match wherewith to light a fire, and the pangs of hunger combined with the cold to keep him long awake; but, finally, he fell asleep to dream of home, and of an abundant meal by the warm fireside—a dream that filled his

heart with joy, and made the awakening to the drear reality of a chill, damp day, and an empty stomach, with nothing to fill it, all the harder to bear.

Feeling very weak and downcast he pluckily set off again, hoping that he was making a good course for William's Creek, yet feeling much troubled about it, for now every step of the way seemed unfamiliar.

That was a terrible day—the miseries of which he never forgot. The way would have been hard enough for him in the full flush of strength, but weakened as he was by hunger and exposure, its difficulties were immensely increased.

Yet he toiled on with grim resolution, often slipping and sometimes falling prone, and at the best not making more than two miles an hour.

In his desperate hunger he chewed leaves and twigs, but they only added to the suffering by causing sharp pains that threatened to double him up in agony.

So the long dreary day dragged itself to a close, and still he had not come within sight of the settlement.

"This night'll be the death of me," he groaned, as he dropped despairingly on the

ground at the foot of a big tree ; and indeed the situation was fast becoming critical, for he felt pitifully weak, and the cold seemed to pierce to his very marrow, in spite of his blankets.

For a long time he lay awake, but at length, in sheer exhaustion, he fell asleep.

He was awakened by the push of a heavy boot against his shoulder, and a rough yet kind voice saying :

"Get up thar, pardner, and tell us how's luck with you."

Delighted at once more being in human company, Norman threw off his blankets, and rose to his feet to find himself in the presence of a big miner, who was regarding him with rather an amused smile.

"Say, pardner," drawled the burly newcomer, "ain't you kinder young to be goin' it alone? This ain't just the country for that sort of thing. Where do you hail from, and what may you be drivin' at?"

Encouraged by the unmistakable kindness of the speaker's tone, Norman at once launched into his story, to which the other listened gravely, interjecting a muffled growl now and then, as the boy described how shamefully he had been treated.

When he had finished the miner relieved his feelings by a very vigorous outburst, and then said :

"Come along with me, I'm makin' for William's Creek ; and if we can get there in time to catch those skulking rascals, they'll have a precious sight livelier time than they calculated on when they played such a low-down game on you."

The man then led the way to his camp, which was near at hand, and where two others were preparing breakfast—the smell of the sizzling bacon setting poor Norman nearly wild, so that he felt as if he must rush at the pan and help himself.

"I reckon you've just got a raw edge on your appetite this morning, eh?" said his new friend, as he motioned him to sit down near the fire. "Ye can have your fill of bacon in a jiffy." Then, turning to the other men, he went on : "Here's a young chap I come upon in the woods most dead with hunger and cold. He's been makin' for William's Creek. I told him he could come along with us."

The two men looked up from their employment for a moment, and grumbled a good-natured assent, thus putting Norman at his

ease, for he was already well-used to the rough-and-ready ways of the mining camps, and he knew that he was thoroughly welcome to this little company.

He felt bound to apologise for his ravenous appetite, but the men only laughed, and told him to pitch in until he could hold no more.

Never did bacon taste so sweet. He had grown very tired of it at the camp, but now it just seemed the finest food in the world; and he ate rasher after rasher smoking hot from the pan, while his host watched him with amused approval.

That afternoon they got to William's Creek, and, accompanied by the miner who had found him, and who went by the name of Long Zeke, Norman instituted a vigorous search for Andy Smith and Jake.

His efforts were fruitless, however, for the men had not stayed at the settlement, but hurried on, leaving no trace of whither they had gone.

Norman now found himself face to face with the problem as to how he should get through the winter.

William's Creek had nothing for him that would afford means of support, for it was

already overcrowded with men out of employment through the shutting down of work at the diggings.

He could not, of course, depend upon charity, however kind and generous many of the miners were ; and so, after talking the matter over with Long Zeke, he determined to make his way down to the coast, and put in the winter there, returning to the gold-fields in the spring.

It was now that his experience in the management of horses stood him in good stead, as, after looking about for a couple of days, he succeeded in securing employment as teamster in the service of a storekeeper who was going down to Lytton for a fresh supply of goods ere the winter closed in.

“ Porky ” Brown, his employer, was a very decent, honest fellow, in spite of his unprepossessing sobriquet, given him because of a certain porcine cast of features ; and Norman felt that his lines had, for the time, fallen unto him in a pleasant place, although there was no lack of hard, and at times dangerous, work.

The pack-train comprised a dozen horses, all of them Indian-bred, and as full of wild

mischievous as their heads could hold. What they didn't know in the way of biting, kicking, and bucking was of small account, and Norman had his hands full with them from start to finish of the day's journey.

Porky Brown, noting with admiration his courage, patience, and firmness in dealing with the refractory animals, said to him, in a tone of benevolent patronage:

"Look here, young feller, ye've got grit, you have. Don't ye want to make the return trip with me? If ye will, I'll keep you all winter, and grub-stake ye in the spring. What do ye say? I mean business, I do."

Norman did not take long to consider the proposition. Utterly destitute as he was, it seemed nothing short of providential, and his response was very hearty:

"All right, sir, I'll do it. You find me for the winter, and fit me out in the spring, and I'll do good work for you. It's a bargain," and he held out his hand, which Brown grasped and shook vigorously, saying:

"Ye'll have no reason to be sorry for taking service with Peter Brown. He'll always do the square thing."

After the rascal who had been his master,

Norman found his new employer's rugged honesty very comforting, and the prospect of passing the winter with him was decidedly pleasing.

The journey to Lytton had no lack of toil and adventure. There were three others in the party besides Porky Brown, whom he had hired to help him with the horses, but none of them knew as much about the management of the animals as Norman, and consequently, whenever any difficulty arose, Brown always directed him to straighten matters out.

In some places the trail skirted the sides of sharp declivities, to which the horses had to cling more like flies than heavily laden beasts of burden, and where, if they lost their footing, they were bound to fall hundreds of feet into the depths below.

Only by the exercise of the utmost care could the animals be got past such dangerous localities, and at each one of them Norman would say to himself:

"I wonder what would happen if we were to meet another pack-train in the middle of one of these places. There'd be trouble, sure enough, and somebody would have a bad time of it."

The very thing he feared came to pass on an unnamed mountain, whose northern side had to be circumvented by creeping along a ledge not more than two feet wide in some places, although it was double as broad elsewhere.

At the narrowest spot Norman, who was just behind his head horse, heard the tinkling of a bell, such as the leader in a mule train always wore, and a few moments later the wearer of it turned the corner.

He was a big grey mule heavily laden, and he came on with his head down as if he could not take his eyes off the narrow path for a moment.

As soon as Norman saw him he shouted : "Whoa, there! Whoa, I tell you!" meaning it for his own animal as well as the other.

But the mule was accustomed to receive orders in Spanish, and did not understand Norman's English; while the horse, laying back his ears and lowering his head, quickened his pace a little, with the evident intention of charging upon his *vis-à-vis*.

"Whoa! Whoa! Stop, I tell you! Stop!" shouted Norman at the top of his voice, as he excitedly strove to get past the horse so as to grasp his head.

But the knowing brute would not let him by, crowding close to the rock wall so as to block his way, and then, before he could do anything to prevent it, the horse rushed at the mule, driving his head in like a wedge between the unfortunate creature, whose heavy load placed it at a great disadvantage, and the side of the precipice.

There was a brief and thrilling struggle as the sure-footed mule fought gallantly to hold its place, and then off it went, turning upside down in the air, and rolling over and over until it was dashed against the merciless boulders in the bottom of the ravine!

Horror-stricken at this catastrophe, Norman could do nothing, save shout :

“ Quiet there ! Quiet, will you ? ” while he made another attempt to reach his horse’s head.

This time, by a clever yet risky vault over the animal’s back, he succeeded just in time to prevent the wicked brute disposing of another mule in similar fashion, when suddenly there appeared behind the endangered animal the swarthy and irate visage of a Mexican muleteer, who levelled a revolver at Norman’s head while he jabbered away furiously in a lingo altogether unintelligible to the startled boy.

Having no weapon of his own, Norman could offer no defence, and devoutly wished himself behind the horse instead of before it.

For a space of time that seemed like an hour, but could hardly have been a minute, the two animals and their drivers were thus posed on the perilous ledge, presenting a picture in the highest degree dramatic.

Only Norman's interposition prevented the horse from attacking the second mule, and yet, instead of being grateful for this service, which was certainly being rendered at no small risk, the Mexican seemed on the point of sending a bullet into the brave boy's brain.

"What is he driving at? If I could only make him out!" groaned poor Norman, in utter perplexity.

Then, just as the muleteer seemed about to pull the trigger, there came from behind Norman the click of a revolver, quickly followed by a sharp report, and the next instant the Mexican's revolver sprang out of his hand, and went careering down the gorge, while he, with a wild howl, clapped his left hand over the other, and danced about in evident agony.

"Kinder neat that, eh, sonny?" drawled Porky Brown's voice in a very well satisfied

tone. "Them greasers don't know how to handle their guns any way. I jest winged that feller. He's not hurt bad, but I reckon he'll not be so fresh about pulling his gun on white folk another time."

CHAPTER XII.

GETTING THROUGH THE WINTER

BUT the disarming of the Mexican did not solve the problem as to how the two trains were to pass on the narrow ledge. Certainly the spot where they had happened to meet afforded no chance for doing it, and in some way a wider place must be sought.

Porky Brown had no doubt in his mind with regard to which of the trains should go back. He was not going to give way to any yellow-skinned "greaser," and after the convincing proof the muleteer had received of his accuracy with the revolver, *he* was not likely to offer very emphatic opposition.

And so it came about that with infinite pains, and a profusion of Spanish profanity, the stupid, stubborn mules were slowly backed, one by one, to a place where the ledge broadened to a width sufficient

to permit of the two trains passing each other.

Brown, revolver in hand, stood guard until all his horses had safely passed. He would not trust the "greasers," of whom there were five in all, any farther than he could see them, and when the difficult task was successfully accomplished, he said with a great grunt of relief :

"Perhaps I ain't glad that job's over, and I jest don't want another in a hurry, I can tell you."

They had no other experience of so exciting a character during the rest of the trip, and with their animals in very good condition reached Lytton, where Brown at once set about obtaining the goods for which he had come.

"We've got no time to lose," he explained to Norman, "for it'll be nip and tuck gettin' back to William's Creek before the snow's too heavy for travelling."

Beyond seeing that the horses were all right, Norman had nothing to do while Brown was purchasing his goods ; so he amused himself strolling about the town, which was simply a helter-skelter aggregation of huts and stores and saloons, roughly built of logs and

slabs, and divided by streets that were little better than exaggerated gutters.

While thus whiling away the time, who should be seen coming towards him but Jake Henson, so engrossed in picking his way through the mud that he was not aware of Norman's approach until the latter sprang at him and, seizing his arm, demanded wrathfully :

"Where's my rifle that you stole? Tell me now!"

The challenge was so sudden and sharp that Jake was completely taken off his guard, and before he knew what he was doing he blurted out :

"Your rifle? It's over at the store;" and then, realising how he was giving himself away, he checked himself, and, roughly shaking off Norman's hand, exclaimed : "What in thunder do I know about your rifle? And who are you, any way? I never laid eyes on you before!"

Enraged at the man's denial following so close upon his involuntary confession, and fearing lest he should get away, and he might not encounter him again, Norman flung himself upon Jake, crying out :

"You're a liar! You know very well who I am, and you stole my rifle."

Jake made a vicious attempt to fell Norman with his fists, but the boy was too strong and agile. He held his arms so that he could not strike out, in the meantime calling out :

" Help ! help ! This man's got my rifle ! "

One of the first to run to his assistance was Porky Brown, who happened to be within earshot, and he at once laid hold of Jake, saying in his cool, determined way :

" Easy now, stranger, easy's the word. Ef this young feller's got anything agin yer, I'm here to see fair play, do you savey ? "

Jake quieted down at once. He knew better than to try conclusions with such a sturdy pair as Brown and Norman, and he trusted in his ability as a liar to get himself out of the difficulty.

" I reckon we'd better adjourn to the store there," said Brown, keeping a good hold upon Jake, " and we can get to the bottom of this thing pretty quick. "

The suggestion met the approval of the crowd that had gathered, and a general move was made to the store indicated.

Here Porky, who had quite taken the affair into his own hands, asked the store-keeper if he'd be the judge for the occasion,

and, after hearing both sides, determine who was in the right.

The storekeeper agreed to this, and a court of summary jurisdiction being thus constituted, Norman was called upon to tell his story.

This he did so briefly and clearly as to make an excellent impression upon all who heard him.

Jake more than once tried to interrupt him, but was promptly ordered to "shut up" by the acting judge, who emphasised his commands with a significant movement of his right hand towards his hip-pocket.

When Norman had finished, the judge turned to Jake and said :

"Ye can go ahead now ; what have yer got to say about the rifle?"

Jake, having by this time thoroughly recovered his self-possession, was quite equal to the occasion, and proceeded to tell what seemed a very straight story about having obtained the rifle in a "swap" with another miner.

As regarded Norman, he flatly denied ever having seen him before, alleging that the boy had either mistaken him for somebody else, or was "off his head."

With so perfectly assumed an air of innocence did he bear himself that the judge began to feel puzzled :

"You're quite sure this is the same chap as was with you on Ace o' Spades Creek?" he inquired of Norman.

"As sure's I'm living and breathing," responded Norman. "Wasn't I with him for more than a month?"

The Solon of the occasion found himself in a dilemma. Each party apparently told the truth, yet both could not be right. After some minutes of deep cogitation a bright idea flashed into his mind, and he exclaimed :

"I've got it, by gum! Somebody get that rifle, quick!"

The rifle was brought, and then, holding it in his hands, he bade Norman turn his back to him.

"Now then, young fellow," he said, "jest you tell me all you know about this gun."

Norman had no difficulty in doing that. He knew every inch of the rifle as thoroughly as his own hand.

Not only so, but once he had with a sharp knife graven the initials of his name on the stock just beside the trigger guard, and the

letters must be there still unless they had been obliterated.

The storekeeper turned the firearm over. He was somewhat short-sighted, and the keenly interested spectators held their breath while he peered at the rifle stock.

For the first time Jake showed signs of uneasiness. He began to feel that the situation was getting rather warm, and to wish himself well out of it.

Norman looked relieved and confident. His rifle seemed as good as recovered already.

"He's right!" cried the judge exultantly, for his heart had been with Norman from the first, although Jake's unblushing mendacity had not been without its effect upon his head. "Here's the letters! I can see them plainly," and, holding up the rifle, he pointed to the spot where "N. T." could be somewhat faintly made out.

This settled the matter. Bluster and protest as Jake might, he could not get a hearing, and the only question that remained was what penalty should be visited upon him.

Norman, well content with the recovery of his rifle, said:

"Oh, let him go; I don't want anything done to him." And after some discussion

this was the action taken, although there were some who warmly advocated the vigorous and well-directed application of a lasso to his bare back.

On being released he slunk out of sight, and Norman saw nothing more of him.

On the following morning Porky Brown was ready for the return journey to William's Creek which, after any amount of hard work and no small danger, was successfully accomplished ere the end of the year.

The winter passed pleasantly enough. Porky Brown, despite his nickname, was anything but a hog, and he treated Norman well; while Norman, on his part, proved a very faithful and zealous assistant, making himself exceedingly useful in the store.

Brown's store was a favourite rendezvous of the miners during the long winter evenings, and the proprietor, being very fond of company, and of a good story, had a welcome for all, even though they bought very little of his goods, and often forgot to pay for what they did get.

Amongst the odd characters always to be found in such a gathering was an old-timer who went by the name of Big Strike Sam, in humorous reference to the fact that he

had never yet made a really good find through all his years of prospecting, but was always going to accomplish it the following season.

If Big Strike Sam could only have hit upon a lead as rich in yellow metal as his memory was in stories, his fortune would have been made indeed.

Some of his yarns amused Norman very much, and he stored them up in his mind that he might repeat them to his brothers when he got back to Walla Walla.

Thus, when the subject of intense cold came up one night, Big Strike Sam got off the following tale with as serious an expression as if he were preaching a sermon :

"Talkin' of cold, are ye?" he said, and the circle of men settled down to listen, knowing well something strong was coming.

"I've been through some cold myself. Out thar in the plains jest beyond the foot-hills. I'd been ridin' all day, and was pretty well tuckered out by sundown. But I dars'en't stop, for it was so dead cold that to be out all night would be to wake up a frozen corpse in the morning ; so I pushed on, keepin' a sharp look-out for a shack where I could get shelter for the night. I had got off the right trail somehow, and didn't know just

where I was, but I knew there were some folks somewhere ahead. All this time it were gettin' colder and colder, until my eyes was most closed up with the lashes freezin' together, and my legs got so stiff that I didn't see how I was ever to get out of my saddle again.

"At last, just when I was thinkin' there weren't no chance for me, and that I'd do no more prospectin', I caught the gleam of a light away over to the left, and that heartened me up so that I come to a little shack with only one window to it, from which the light was showin'. Well, I tumbled off my horse somehow, and set to hammerin' on the door, which was shut tight, shoutin', 'Hullo, there! Let a feller inside, will yer? I'm 'most froze to death!'

"But hammer and shout as I might there weren't no answer, and at last, gettin' mad, I just drew off a bit, and then run ag'in the door with my shoulder, bursting it wide open, and pitching head first into the place.

"When I picked myself up there was a man under a pile of blankets and skins in the corner who'd just got his eyes open. And, feelin' kinder riled at bein' kept so long out in the cold, I asked him pretty sharply why he didn't let me in before.

“ ‘ I didn’t hear you,’ he says ; ‘ the blankets was over my head, and I was just dead asleep.’ ”

“ ‘ You wasn’t asleep, you was drunk,’ says I, ‘ or else you’d ’a’ blowed out yer light.’ ”

“ ‘ I couldn’t,’ says he, ‘ it was froze.’ ”

After the roar of laughter this yarn evoked subsided no one else had the courage to attempt a further story upon the subject of intense cold.

But Norman was not content simply with amusing stories.

Among the *habitués* of the store were many miners of long experience, who were either temporarily down on their luck, or had come in from their claims for the winter.

At every opportunity he entered into conversation with these men, and sought to get the benefit of their experience. He would thus listen for hours while in their own homely, yet effective, fashion they described the different methods of seeking out the hidden gold and compelling its surrender by the sand, or clay, or obdurate quartz that held it captive.

They explained how, in prospecting, the miner kept a sharp look-out for that “ colour ” of the earth which indicated the presence of the metallic sand where the gold was found.

Although many good "strikes" had been made away from the bank of a stream, still, the river-sides were the places where gold was generally first looked for and worked.

Such workings were called "bars," and were usually named after the prospector, or from some incident connected with the discovery.

When the pan showed promising results it was discarded for the "rocker," or "cradle," in which the work of washing out the gold could be done more effectively and on a larger scale.

The rocker was a box about four feet long, two feet wide, and one and a half deep, having the top and one end open, and at the lower end the sides sloping gradually to the bottom. To the head was attached a smaller box, closely jointed, and having a sheet-iron bottom pierced with holes large enough to prevent the passage of pebbles. Rockers, like those on a child's cradle, were fixed on the outside of the big box, while along the inside were laid cleats to catch the grains of gold in their passage.

The rocker being placed by the water's edge, one miner then shovelled the gold-

bearing earth into the upper iron box, while another rocked and poured in water.

In this way the soil was carried off, leaving the stones and gold to settle in the bottom of the rocker, where the cleats caught the precious metal, quicksilver often being used to ensure the work being thoroughly done.

A still more effective operation was that of "sluicing," which could be carried out on any scale, from just two or three men working at a river-bar to a powerful company washing away whole hillsides by the hydraulic process.

For this a great supply of water was necessary, which was carried to the spot by wooden aqueducts called "flumes" that, in some cases, were thousands of feet in length. These flumes were brought along the back of the river-bar or diggings, and then the miners led sluices from them to their own claims, the sluices being placed at such an angle that the water would run through them with sufficient force to carry away the earth, but not the gold, which was caught by the "riffles" and the quicksilver.

"Ah, but that's all child's play to the hydraulics," exclaimed California Sam, a miner who, after making and squandering a couple

of fortunes already, was now in eager quest of a third. "You should just see how they do things down at Timbuctoo," referring to a famous gold region in the big state after which he was named; and then he proceeded to describe the gigantic scale on which operations were carried on at that place. How a series of sluice-boxes—built in the strongest possible way, and having bottoms lined with wooden blocks, whose interstices were filled with quicksilver—would be properly placed at the foot of a hill several hundred feet in length.

Then this hill would be attacked, not with such slow tools as pick and shovel, but by a great stream of water thrown against it through a machine called a monitor, fixed to the end of a canvas hose six inches in diameter.

This stream of water, which had been brought down from the mountains, and hence had a tremendous "head," issued from the monitor with such terrific force as to cut a man in two were he unfortunate enough to be struck by it.

Directed against the hillside, it was simply irresistible—eating into it as though the hard earth were simply sugar, and sweeping hundreds of tons into the sluice-boxes, where they

were forced to yield up whatever gold they held in bondage.

Listening attentively to such descriptions, and to relations of actual experience, Norman filled his mind with much valuable knowledge, and thus fitted himself for the venture on his own account he was to make as soon as spring opened.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN AWKWARD SITUATION.

As spring drew near Norman began to plan for his prospecting trip, and this time his mind was fully made up that if he could not succeed in having better company than he had the preceding season he would go alone.

With the melting of the snows there came to William's Creek a great influx of eager gold-hunters, most of them new to the work, although there was of course a good proportion of old hands who had failed to "strike it rich" in other fields, and were about to make one more venture in the Cariboo region.

Porky Brown's store was visited by many of these men, and Norman listened intently to their talk. His employer was so well pleased with the way he had served him that he had promised him a good outfit when

he did start, so that Norman felt he was in a position of equality with the others and needed to ask no favours.

He had made the most of his opportunities during the winter, and had picked up a large amount of information with regard to prospecting, mining, the securing of claims, and all the other details of the life he had in view.

He was now nearing eighteen, but looked more like twenty years of age, having in the past year added to his bone and sinew at a remarkable rate.

While not precisely handsome, he had a very prepossessing countenance, whose expression of quiet resolution and self-reliance won respect among all who knew how to appreciate those fine qualities.

Despite the temptations that beset him he would have nothing to do with tobacco, liquor, or cards. Others might be able to use them with impunity, he argued, but that was no warrant of his doing so, and he had come to British Columbia to seek his fortune, not for diversion or dissipation.

Of course he was ridiculed, and jeering nicknames were given him; but this had no more effect upon him than rain upon a tin roof. He kept a firm grip on his temper,

and the only notice he ever took of such teasing was to smile back in a way that said plainly :

“ Fire away—if that amuses you it doesn't hurt me.”

The temper was there all right, and would flash out fiercely enough upon due occasion, but no amount of banter could succeed in arousing it.

Among those who came to Brown's store was a big man who reminded Norman very much of Maclellan, and for that reason he liked him at sight.

He was an Englishman named Walter Hadow, the younger son of a fine Old Country family, who had come out to British Columbia in the hope of winning a fortune for himself, since he would not inherit one.

So far the fortune was still to seek, although he had had one or two bits of luck that kept him from being hopelessly stranded.

Too proud to be dependent upon others, he was not too proud to turn his hand to any honest employment that offered, and on finding in Norman a very attentive and appreciative listener, he related to him some of the odd experiences which had befallen him since coming to the country.

Thus once, after a long run of hard luck, he was glad to join a party engaged in boating freight up the Fraser River in huge wooden canoes, and spent a good part of a summer in this difficult and dangerous occupation, during which he more than once narrowly escaped losing his life in the furious current that opposed every foot of the flotilla's upward progress.

While wintering in Victoria he had at different times kept himself from starvation by clearing town lots of stumps ; by acting as drayman ; by assisting in an assayer's office, for which position a slight knowledge of chemistry was his only qualification ; and finally, by making more practical use of the ability as an oarsman attained at Oxford than any other graduate had likely ever done, for, seeing that a regatta was shortly to come off, he sought out a partner no less expert, and the pair practised diligently, with the result that on the auspicious day they won three races between them—to wit, the pair-oared, double-scutt, and single-scutt events, the stakes thus gathered in netting a sufficient amount to set them both up for a new start at gold-hunting.

Another experience of Hadow's that he told Norman was as follows :

"I had made some little money in one way or another, and was not quite clear in my mind as to how I should invest it, when a friend named Walters proposed trying a trading trip among the Indians of the Queen Charlotte Islands. The idea seemed a good one, and we found that, by clubbing together our resources, we could manage to buy a small schooner of about thirty tons, and get sufficient cargo on credit to stock her.

"We went first to Bella Coola on the mainland, thence to Queen Charlotte Island and Fort Simpson, and then, growing bolder, continued our voyage far past Sitka to the Aleutian Islands. We were poaching up there, for the Russians allowed no foreign traders in their waters; but we knew there was only one Russian man-of-war about, and we heard that *she* was docked at Petropolauski.

"We got a lot of fine skins, such as sea otter, silver-grey foxes, sables, and so on, and soon the most of our cargo was gone in exchange for them; but having a small quantity of goods left, we decided to try the north shore of Vancouver Island on our way back to Victoria.

"We ran into a small harbour near Esperanza Inlet, and traded away the re-

mainder of our stuff. Not particularly liking the looks of the Indians, we allowed only one canoe at a time to come near us.

“When we were ready to start for Victoria we found such a gale blowing that we dared not venture out in our little schooner, now in ballast, and so we anchored behind the headland at the mouth of the harbour.

“On the nearest shore was an Indian village, and we could see that the savages were in an unusual state of excitement. The old chief was vigorously haranguing his men, and it was plain from his gestures that the schooner was the subject of his address. Tom, our interpreter, an intelligent Indian we had picked up at Quatseeno, said that these Indians were a very bad lot, and had some time ago murdered and eaten the crew of a small Russian schooner wrecked near by. We rather doubted the cannibalism part of his story, but the killing seemed likely enough, especially as poor Tom was in manifest terror of his life. There were only five of us—viz., Walters, the two deck hands, Tom, and myself, while the Indians numbered over a hundred.

“As it drew towards sundown the commo-

tion on shore increased, and the savages were evidently getting their canoes ready for a night attack. We on our part were not idle. We cut a couple of loopholes in the bulwarks on each side, through which we could fire without exposing ourselves, and we saw that our firearms were all in good order, and the ammunition at hand.

“As soon as darkness settled down on us the expected attack took place. We could just make out through the gloom the approaching canoes, of which there seemed to be fully a score. When they were within two hundred yards of us Tom hailed them, saying that if they came any nearer we would fire upon them. But they kept right on as if they did not hear him, and so I took aim at the savage standing up in the stern of the foremost canoe, and gave him one chamber of my six-shooter. With an awful howl he tumbled over, and his canoe came to a full stop, all the others following suit.

“While they halted we hove up our anchor and set the sails, thinking it better to brave even the fury of the storm outside than take our chances with the savages.

“Directly they saw us moving away they set off as hard as they could paddle for the

mouth of the harbour, and their light canoes going faster than our clumsy craft they soon were ahead of us to bar the passage. They then divided their forces, half the canoes going on our port bow, and half on the star-board, so that we should have to run the gauntlet of them to get out. The instant we were within range of their bows they let fly at us, the arrows whizzing over our heads, and some sticking on the mainsail. There could no longer be any mistake about their evil intentions. We were to be both plundered and murdered."

Norman gave a shudder as he listened, which Hadow noted ; so he broke the thread of the narration to say :

"You would not like to be in such a scrape, would you? I never think of it now without being profoundly thankful for my escape. Well, to continue. Walters held the tiller, sitting down in the hatchway so as to be protected, and we went to the little port-holes we had cut, two on each side, and, lying flat on the deck, we proceeded to fire into the canoes, taking aim where the dark figures seemed thickest. From the yells and groans that followed our shots it was plain our bullets did not miss, while the arrows

that came back stuck either in the masts or sails, without doing us any harm.

"Suddenly there was an awful bang. Tom's old musket had burst, happily, however, without hurting him, although the bulwarks were splintered.

"At this point the Indians withdrew again, and held another consultation. In the meantime we were creeping towards the harbour mouth. But in that darkness we knew it was an awful risk to try the narrow channel through the bar. The odds were that we should run aground, and get knocked to pieces in short order by the tremendous surf running outside.

"After parleying among themselves awhile the savages started for us again, this time coming in a body, evidently meaning to take us by storm. We let them come quite close, and then we blazed at them with our whole battery, the groans and splashes that followed telling how effective our volley had been.

"Yet it did not stop them this time, and the next minute they were trying to board us at the bows. We had some blue lights aboard, and I instantly lit one, the strange glare showing the two deck hands heaving a couple of Indians overboard, while Tom was slashing

away with a bowie-knife at the hands of two others who were clinging to the bow chains.

“I had just fixed the blue light, when I heard the crunch of a smashed skull behind me, and, swinging around, saw a big Indian fall to the deck, while one of the sailors said, with a great gasp of relief:

“‘That was a close shave, mister. The black scoundrel was goin’ to drive his spear into yer back when I dropped him!’

“I was deeply grateful, you may be sure; but there was no time to show it, for the savages were coming at us on all sides, and we had to work like Trojans to keep them from overwhelming us.

“At last we shook them all off, and were beginning to draw breath, when poor Walters called out: ‘I’m hit!’ and sank in a heap on the deck, shot through the chest by a stray arrow.

“Throughout the whole fight he had stuck manfully to the tiller, keeping the little schooner in her course, but when it dropped from his lifeless hand the vessel instantly fell away, and the next moment struck full upon the bar, the great waves sweeping over her as if exulting in her helplessness.

“Walters’ death was a terrible blow to me.

He had borne himself so bravely through it all, and was such a good fellow in every way. We carried his body into the cabin, determining to give it Christian burial if we ever had the chance.

“Setting off another blue light, I looked around to see if there was any hope for us, but one glance was sufficient to show that the schooner was doomed. The breakers extended far beyond us. We had drifted completely out of the channel, and it was only a question of time with the vessel. She was bound to break up.

“Our position now was an extremely critical one, for, although all danger from the Indians was over until daylight, at any rate, as it was altogether too rough for any canoe to live, yet if we remained where we were the schooner would certainly go to pieces beneath us.

“Happily, in the course of an hour the gale moderated somewhat, and the sea began to go down. We waited another hour, and then, putting into our canoe some provisions, and getting together all our money and valuables, we pushed off, leaving property worth many thousand dollars to the savages.

“We took poor Walters' body with us too, and made our way along the shore for several

miles until we came to a tiny bay, where we landed and lay down to rest.

"The next day was bright and fair, and after burying our comrade, and marking his grave with a cairn, we set out for Victoria, where we arrived ten days later, poorer than we had left the place in the spring, although in the interval we had made a nice little fortune."

"That was mighty hard luck, to be sure," said Norman sympathetically, when Hadow had finished his story. "Just to think of those rascally Indians getting all your fine furs! It makes a fellow's blood boil."

The result of the growing friendship between Norman and Hadow was that they arranged to go together on a prospecting trip as soon as the snow began to leave the woods.

When the time came they started off full of hope. Their outfit was simple yet sufficient, for Hadow's resources enabled him to obtain all that was really necessary for himself, while Porky Brown kept his word handsomely by giving Norman an adequate supply of provisions, clothing, and mining tools, besides lending him a mule upon which to pack them, the understanding being that Norman

was to pay for the animal if he "struck it rich," and to return him if he didn't.

"I'm going to call my mule Atlas," said Hadow laughingly, "because he carries all that I have in the world on his back. What will you call yours, Norman?"

"I haven't thought of anything in particular," responded Norman. "How would Pay Dirt do?"

"And why Pay Dirt?" asked Hadow.

"Because that's what we want to strike, isn't it? And if I'm not much mistaken this critter will take a lot of licking to make him go at a decent pace."

"Not so bad for you, my boy," laughed Hadow, clapping him on the back. "We'll hope that Pay Dirt will bring us good luck."

So they set out in high spirits, rejoicing in their health and strength, secure of one another's good-fellowship, and sanguine of having something substantial to show at the end of their season's work.

Although it was well on in May, there was a good deal of snow still in the woods, the depth of it sometimes being quite three feet, and this made the travelling slow and difficult, the mules floundering and plunging about with their heavy loads.

Having decided to try entirely new ground, where no white man had previously penetrated, they had no track to follow, and were obliged to keep as close as possible to the river, which, swollen to double its normal size by the melting snows, rushed furiously through rocky cañons, or spread itself in willow-covered swamps where the beaver dams were to be frequently seen.

The early morning, before the effect of the sun's heat upon the surface of the snow, hardened by the preceding night's frost, had made itself felt, was the best time for traveling, and they were always moving before dawn, postponing breakfast until they had gone several miles.

As soon as the sun gained any power the snow softened, and every few yards either man or mule would go through, and perhaps strike against the trunk of a fallen tree which the white covering had hidden.

Nor was the snow their only difficulty. It often happened that the mountains came down to the edge of the torrent in a sheer, unbroken face that offered no foothold whatever; or they showed a sharp slope covered with *débris*, across which the prospectors had to pick their course with utmost care, for at any

moment the surface might slide away, carrying them helplessly with it to certain death.

When the cliffs came right to the river brink it was necessary to go round the back, or over the crests, of the mountains, and the doing this cost an infinity of toil besides exposing the daring gold-hunters to great danger.

While descending the side of such a mountain one morning, Hadow had a very narrow escape that taught him to be more cautious in future.

On reaching the summit they saw before them a smooth slope at an angle of about forty-five degrees, that seemed too tempting for him to resist.

"I'm going to try a coast," he said, putting his pack on the hard snow. "The mules will find their own way down all right." And off he went, at a great pace, lying upon his pack.

Norman preferred the slower but safer method of walking, and watched his companion with some concern as the latter shot over the smooth surface.

All went well until Hadow got about half-way down, and then, to his horror, he suddenly saw, breaking through the white space before him, the top of an enormous spruce-tree about



"A PRECIPICE OF NEARLY TWO HUNDRED FEET YAWNING IN FRONT OF HIM, TOWARDS WHICH HE WAS SPINNING AT A BREATHLESS RATE!"

thirty yards ahead of him, while the snow-covered tops of other trees appeared sloping away beneath it. There was evidently a precipice of nearly two hundred feet yawning in front of him, towards which he was spinning at a breathless rate !

CHAPTER XIV.

GOLD AT LAST!

NORMAN, who was taking the mules round by a less precipitous path, saw nothing of his companion's peril, nor could he have been of any assistance if he had.

For a moment Hadow gave himself up for lost. There seemed no way of averting his swift flight ere he shot over the edge of the cliff into the chasm.

Then his eye fell upon a small fir-tree emerging from the snow near the brink of the precipice. It was not directly in the line of his descent, but he might manage to steer towards it.

With the strength of despair he threw himself in the direction of the tree, and was fortunate enough to get his hands upon it as he flew past.

So great was his impetus that the little tree bent almost double, and threatened to

come away by the roots ; while his arms were nearly wrenched out of their sockets by the sudden and severe strain.

But happily both the tree and his arms held, and after one instant of harrowing suspense all danger was over.

What with the excitement and the intense effort he was quite overcome, and it was some minutes before he could resume the descent in a more cautious and leisurely fashion, letting his pack roll down ahead of him instead of using it as a sled.

As they pushed on into the wilderness the travelling became easier. The valley they followed up widened, and the stream spread itself into a large river, with meadows on either side that afforded fine pasturing for the mules.

Each day the air grew warmer. There was no longer frost at night, and the monotony of snow gave place to a wonderful variety of trees, shrubs, and wild-flowers, while berries of many kinds grew in satisfying profusion.

The forest abounded in game, and the river in fish. At night, as they lay beside their camp-fire, they heard through the warm stillness the sonorous bellow of the moose, the harsh scream of the coyote, and the deep

growl of the bear ; while during the day they were continually putting up flocks of grouse or partridge that whirred off in alarm at the invaders of their peace.

It was a veritable hunter's paradise, and Hadow was perfectly sincere when he exclaimed :

"Oh, but this is God's own country ! I've knocked about the world a good deal, but this is the finest place I've ever seen. I'm right glad I've come to it, even though I never find enough gold to pay my way back again."

But of course it was to find gold, and not simply to have a good time, that they were there, and they would never have allowed the charms of the region to distract their attention from their main purpose.

At last one day they saw across the river, at a place where the valley narrowed, a little creek coming down from the mountain side whose banks had a very promising appearance, and they resolved to make it the end of their pilgrimage in that direction.

"We'll give that creek a good trial, Norman," said Hadow, "and if it doesn't pan out well we'll not push any farther east, but work back to William's Creek again."

"All right," assented Norman ; "the creek

has a likely look. But how are we going to get across the river?"

How were they, indeed? The river was still swollen by the melting of the snow far up among the mountains, and its swift flood swept past them in a volume that defied any attempt at fording, and in whose mighty grasp a raft would be utterly unmanageable.

"We've got to bridge it somehow," said Hadow. "Let's see if we cannot find a place where the river is not so wide. It's no use standing here and looking at it. We can't afford to wait for the waters to fall."

They accordingly agreed to search for what they wanted, Hadow going up and Norman down stream.

In this quest fortune favoured Norman; for after walking a couple of miles he stopped, and shouted joyfully:

"The very thing! Just what we want! Now we can get over easy enough."

What he had found was an island in the middle of the stream dividing it into two branches, of which the farther one was narrow and not deep. Close to the river-bank grew a large pine-tree, quite long enough to span the nearer channel, and it was only necessary to cut this down so that

it should fall in the right direction in order to have a safe and sufficient bridge.

Thoroughly pleased with the discovery, Norman turned and hurried after Hadow.

But the latter had gone so far that it took him a long time to catch him up; and when he did reach him, and report his success, sundown was so near that they decided to postpone further operations until the morning.

That night it rained heavily, and by morning the river had risen over three feet on its banks, and was roaring past more furiously than ever.

"We're likely to have a hard job of it, Norman," said Hadow, shaking his head, while his handsome face bore an unusually serious look. "I'm sorry now we didn't get over last night."

"Let us cut the tree down, at all events," said Norman, "and if it won't do, then we'll just try some other place."

"Come along, then," said Hadow, and so they set to work with their axes in vigorous style.

They were neither of them experienced woodsmen, and had little knowledge of the way to make a tree fall in a particular direction, and therefore it was only to be

expected that they should somewhat miss their mark.

So it happened that, instead of falling straight across the stream, the tree went slantwise, its top just reaching the island.

In this position it offered a very untrustworthy means of crossing, and the two impatient gold-hunters regarded their work with considerable dismay.

"We've made a poor job of it, haven't we, Norman?" remarked Hadow, with a grim smile. "That tree doesn't look any too tempting, I must confess."

"You're right—it doesn't," responded Norman, "but it's our only way of getting across, so we may as well try it."

"Well, let me go first, my boy," said Hadow, "and if I get over all right, you come along after me."

Having caught the bulk of their belongings, and hobbled the mules so that they could not wander too far, they made up into two packs a couple of days' provisions and what tools were absolutely necessary for their work.

With the larger pack upon his shoulders Hadow began the crossing of the river. It certainly seemed a very perilous undertaking. In the centre of the stream, where the tree

sank from its own weight, the turbulent torrent was just lapping it ; and when the weight of the person crossing came upon it there would, without doubt, be a further sinking.

The stream was rushing on with appalling fury, every now and then loosening from its banks large rocks, which fell in with dull, heavy splashes, just heard above the roaring of the waters. At any moment some huge tree, torn up by the roots, might come tumbling down with the flood, and sweep away their sole means of crossing. It was the apprehension of this that made Hadow so anxious to get over.

Hadow held his knife in his hand, so that if he fell from the tree he might at once cut the cords that held his pack, and free himself from it.

Carefully avoiding the little branches that stuck out from the trunk, he walked onward with steady steps until he reached the centre. Here his weight so depressed the slender bridge that it sank until the water was halfway to his knee.

For a moment he halted, and seemed to waver, and Norman's heart stood still. If he should lose his balance and plunge into that seething whirlpool, strong swimmer as

he was, there would be small chance of his getting out again.

But he had only paused to steady himself, and in another moment had started again, and with quickened step, which took him safely to the other shore.

"Hurrah!" shouted Norman, vastly relieved.
"Now I'm coming."

"Go slow, then!" Hadow called to him.
"Don't try to rush it."

Norman would have much preferred rushing it, so as to get the ordeal over as soon as possible; but he obeyed his companion and moved slowly, taking care to avoid the projecting branches.

In this way he had reached the middle, where the water surged about his feet, and he had to balance himself at each step, when a shout of warning from Hadow caused him to look up, and there, coming down-stream with the speed of an express train, was a great tree-trunk with wide, spreading roots—a veritable engine of destruction.

For a moment he was paralysed at the sight. Then the instinct of self-preservation asserted itself, and he dashed forward, heedless of the bending of the tree or the swirling of the waters.

Just as he was getting over the worst part, and nearing the shore where Hadow stood ready to receive him, a stout twig caught his foot, and he as nearly as possible pitched headlong into the torrent.

But recovering himself by a tremendous effort he made a wild rush for the shore. When almost there he slipped from the tree-trunk and fell, half in the water and half out, with his hands grasping a root that projected from the bank.

In an instant Hadow's strong arms were about him, and he was dragged from the deadly embrace of the raging torrent just before the great tree that was whirling down struck the bridge, and tore it resistlessly away.

"Ah! but that was a narrow squeak!" said Norman, with a beaming smile of gratitude. "We won't run any more such risks, will we?"

"Not if we can possibly help it, my boy," responded Hadow. "And now let us see about getting over the other branch of the river."

Fortunately this was not so much affected by the flood, and they were able to reach the farther bank with nothing worse than a wetting.

"Thank Heaven, we've got across all right!" exclaimed Hadow with a sigh of profound relief. "We'll soon find out what that creek has for us."

They set to work manfully on the bank and bars of the little stream, digging into the sand at different places, and washing panfuls of it with exceeding care.

But the hours went by until midday, and not a sign of "colour" showed in the pan to gladden their eager eyes.

When they knocked off for dinner they were both feeling somewhat depressed. If ever a place looked promising this one did, and yet not a single grain of gold had they lighted upon.

But the refreshment and rest of the meal restored their spirits in good measure, and they resumed work in the afternoon with unabated vigour.

Norman suggested going up the creek a bit where the ground was shallower, and the bed-rock cropped out on the surface.

"You try it, Norman," said Hadow, "while I keep on at the bars, and let us see who'll strike pay gravel first."

"All right," responded Norman, and off he went whistling merrily.

After going about a mile he came to a spot that drew from him the exclamation :

"Well, if there's not some gold just here, I don't believe there's any about the creek !"

Quickly clearing off the surface earth he worked down to the rock, and filled his pan with the dirt that lay next to it.

This he washed out slowly and carefully, for he was resolved to run no risk of losing a single golden grain were it concealed in the obscuring mud.

When the greater part of the dirt had been carried off by the water, he plunged his hands into what remained, and felt about with his fingers.

In an instant he sprang to his feet with his heart beating like a mad thing, and barely able to breathe, so intense was his excitement.

Between his fingers he held what looked like nothing more than a common pebble ; but as he felt its weight he gave a cry of joy, and put it between his teeth to give it a hard bite.

When he withdrew the pebble there was the unmistakable glint of gold where his strong, sharp teeth had cut through its dark casing, and, flinging his hat high into the air, he gave vent to whoop after whoop of triumph.

"I've struck it! I've struck it!" he cried, and darting at the pan he snatched up another dirty pebble.

The test of the teeth gave the same gratifying result as before; and now, feeling perfectly sure that the eagerly sought fortune was to be realised at last, he set off at a run to communicate the glad news to Hadow.

He found him toiling away at the bars, and from his clouded countenance it was evident that the "pay dirt" was still eluding his search.

"Hullo! how's luck?" Norman inquired, managing by great effort to conceal his own excitement.

"No luck at all," growled Hadow. "I'm about coming to the conclusion that we'll have to try some other place. Have you found any colour?"

By way of answer Norman tossed him one of the "pebbles," saying:

"Bite that, and see how it tastes."

Hadow didn't need to bite it. The moment his fingers closed upon it he knew what he held, and his fine face lit up wonderfully as he cried:

"In fortune's name, Norman, where did you find this?"

Norman's face was a picture. He rightly enough felt this to be the proudest moment of his life, and, although there was only one to witness his triumph, he wanted to make the most of it.

"What will you give me if I tell you?" he asked, with a roguish look.

"Give you! why——" and then, his impatience carrying him away, he caught Norman by the arm, exclaiming:

"Come along, if you love me, and show me the spot!"

Laughing merrily, Norman started off at a run, and neither of them halted until, completely out of breath, they reached the spot whence the little nuggets had come.

Quivering with excitement, Hadow filled the pan and rocked it skilfully until the water ran from it clear.

In the bottom were a small nugget and a number of little pieces no larger than millet-seed.

"Norman," he said slowly, striving hard to control his emotion, "our fortune's made. I was afraid at first your find might be only a pocket in the rock that would soon pan out. But these little darlings," and he pressed the

tiny bits lovingly in his fingers, "they mean that we are rich men."

When their first flush of excitement had subsided, they tried in several other places, and with the same gratifying result.

Each time the pan yielded sufficient gold to strengthen their faith that they had discovered a "Bonanza," and that their quest for fortune was ended.

"We must stake out our claim immediately," said Hadow, "and then one of us must go back to William's Creek for more tools and provisions, so that we can put in the summer here."

Accordingly a young spruce-tree was cut down, and six large, smooth stakes fashioned out of it.

On these they wrote their names in heavy letters with a carpenter's pencil Norman had, and then, measuring off two hundred feet apiece down the creek—that being the size allowed by law for a "discovery claim"—they drove the stakes into the ground, thereby establishing their right until they should be able to obtain the Government lease.

Gloriously content with their day's work they ate a hearty supper, and after talking for a couple of hours as to what they should

do with their fortune when it was all realised, they rolled up their blankets, both feeling happier than they ever had in their lives before.

By the next morning the swelling of the river had quite subsided, and there would be no difficulty in re-crossing upon a tree-trunk that had come down with the flood, and stranded in such a way as to bridge the deepest part of the channel.

It was arranged between them that Hadow should go down to William's Creek while Norman remained to guard their claims.

The snow having all gone, and the streams shrunk to their normal size, he could travel far more rapidly than they had been able to do on the way up, and, barring mishaps, ought to be back within a week.

"Don't make it any longer, please," Norman said, with a rueful expression that was much exaggerated. "It'll be dreadfully lonesome here with only Pay Dirt to keep me company."

"I won't let the grass grow under my feet, you may depend," responded Hadow, with a smile. "You just hold the fort for a week, and I'll be back with everything we'll need for the rest of the season."

All the provisions, save what Hadow would

take with him, were carried over to the diggings, and Pay Dirt, much against his will, was made to swim across the river.

By managing carefully, and having some luck in shooting game, Norman was supplied for a full month, so that he had nothing to fear on the score of food.

With the other mule to carry his food and blankets, Hadow set off for the settlement, Norman waving his hat in farewell as he disappeared around a bend of the valley.

He was thus again left alone in the wilderness, but under what wonderfully different conditions!

On the previous occasion he was the much-abused drudge of a rascally employer; now he was his own master, the equal partner with a thoroughly upright and lovable man, and the finder of a gold deposit that promised to make them both rich for life.

This was enough to keep him in good spirits, and he had no thought of yielding to any feelings of depression during his solitary guard-duty.

"If you were only a fine big dog, now, instead of a mule," he said, addressing Pay Dirt, as that sagacious animal contentedly browsed upon the succulent herbage, "you'd

be more use to me at present ; but never mind, old fellow, you did good work in getting me here, and we'll just be great chums until partner comes back—won't we?" and he lovingly patted the creature's neck.

But in spite of the great change in his prospects, Norman did not look forward to the solitude, and sighed for the time when he should again see his genial companion.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FINDING OF THE NUGGET.

NORMAN had no idea of idling during his partner's absence. If only for the sake of whiling away the time he intended to work steadily at digging out and washing the gold-bearing earth, and he went at it with his wonted energy and thoroughness.

The results of the successive pans differed a good deal, but none of them proved altogether disappointing, and each day saw an important addition to the store of nuggets and dust that was accumulating.

"Hadow will see that I've not been loafing," he said proudly to himself; and the desire to surprise his partner by a goodly show of gold inspired him to unremitting effort.

He was always hoping to come across a nugget, or maybe a pocket, that would cast into the shade the first find, and have this to make Hadow's heart glad on his return.

Thus the days slipped by without special incident, and the end of the week came. If all had gone well with Hadow, he ought to be back ere another sunset, and, cheered by the glad prospect, Norman toiled away more strenuously than ever.

A little distance from where he first found gold he had been working with good results, and there was in his mind an indefinite conviction that the spot would yield something extraordinary, although he could not account for it.

The afternoon was waning, and he had about decided to quit work for the day when the point of his pick struck something that did not feel like a stone.

"Great guns! can it be a nugget?" he exclaimed, and, quivering with excitement, he grubbed about carefully, so that it might not be injured or broken by the pick.

Finally he set to work with his hands, and in another instant had risen to his feet, holding in his fingers an irregular lump larger than a hot-cross bun, one side of which, where the pick had struck it, showed a golden gleam that at once proclaimed its royal character, even if that had not been already revealed by its weight.

For the first moment Norman could not speak. His joy was so great as to render him dumb. Then he sent forth a whoop worthy of a veteran redskin, and, still holding the nugget in both hands, danced about like one possessed, shouting :

"Oh, Hadow, Hadow, hurry up! I'm just dying for you to see this."

In his wild impatience to exhibit his prize he even ran down the river-bank some distance on the chance of Hadow being a little ahead of time, and not until he was thoroughly tired out did he return to the diggings.

Thenceforward he could not settle down to work as he had before.

Day after day passed without any sign of Hadow, while Norman's wonder deepened and his anxiety grew keener.

"What can be keeping him?" he exclaimed a thousand times. "Something must have happened to him. Perhaps he's fallen over a cliff, or been carried away when fording the river."

The days dragged on until the end of another week came, and poor Norman could endure the terrible suspense no longer.

"I can't stop here," he cried. "I can't stand it. I'll have to go and see what's the matter."

This resolution arrived at, he lost no time in carrying it out.

The noble nugget, and the greater part of the gold, he thought it wisest to hide on the spot, as if he took it with him now he might be waylaid and robbed of it, for there was no lack of ruffians on the outskirts of the settlement who would not hesitate to take advantage of his being alone.

So, selecting with much care a secluded spot where the turf was thick and strong, he cleverly lifted a piece about two feet square, dug out the earth beneath, and in this hiding-place deposited his precious little package, putting the square of turf back so skilfully that unless you were intently looking for such a cache you could not possibly have discovered it.

"There, now," he said, standing back and surveying his work with entire satisfaction. "That's safe enough, I guess."

The mining tools and other things not needed for his trip down he hid in a dense part of the bush, and then, packing his provisions and blankets upon Pay Dirt, he started off for William's Creek, finding in the activity of motion some relief from the fears and forebodings which had been worrying him since Hadow was overdue.

He felt no doubt of being able to find his way. His bump of locality was well developed, and he had a keen eye and an unerring memory for the natural features of any region through which he passed.

But he made much slower progress than he had counted upon.

Pay Dirt began to display a most unwelcome resemblance to that biblical character, Jeshurun, of whom it is recorded that he waxed fat and kicked. The weeks of luxurious idleness on the rich grass of the river valley had caused his ribs to vanish and his flanks to fill out, and he no longer took any pride in his work.

Norman exhausted his vocabulary of opprobrious epithets, and wore out his own strength, not to mention switches innumerable, in stimulating the mule's rate of progress; but the obstinate creature held his own side of the argument with wonderful tenacity, and consequently the journey to William's Creek lengthened out beyond all Norman's expectations.

It is a long lane, however, that has no turning, and in due time, completely worn out with work and worry, he reached the settlement.

His first proceeding was to seek out Porky Brown, in order to ask him if he had seen Hadow.

"Why, Norman, boy, is that yourself?" was the worthy storekeeper's hearty greeting. "Where do you hail from now? and how's luck been with you?"

"Where's Hadow? Haven't you seen him?" cried Norman, ignoring the other's queries in his anxiety to learn something about his partner.

"Hadow!" exclaimed Brown. "Why, wasn't he with you? What's up?" for he saw that Norman was profoundly agitated. "Come over here and tell me all about it"; and he drew him to the back of the store where they could talk without being overheard.

Having entire confidence in his former employer, who was indeed as honest as he was shrewd, Norman told him the whole story, not omitting to mention the nugget.

"Well, now, that is queer," said Porky, rubbing the bristles on his chin as if he would thereby generate inspiration. "What can have become of Hadow? Something's happened to him, sure. Let us go out and see if we can light on any news."

They went through the length and breadth of the diggings, inquiring of everybody they met, but getting no clue to the mystery.

Hadow seemed to have disappeared, leaving no trace behind.

Not until the afternoon of the next day did Norman bethink himself of registering the claims. Then, accompanied by Brown, who was proving a real friend in need, he went to the office of the gold commissioner and applied for the necessary mining lease.

To his utter stupefaction the gold commissioner, on receiving his description of the locality, subjected him to a searching scrutiny as he said in a cold, dry tone :

"I am afraid you are too late. If your description is correct, those claims have already been taken up."

At first Norman could not believe his ears, and he turned an appealing face towards Brown, as though to ask dumbly :

"What is he saying? What does he mean?"

The commissioner, who was as noted for his courtesy as he was for his integrity and firmness, divining from Norman's conduct that there was something strange in the affair, said in a more kindly tone than he had first used :

"Are you sure your description is correct? Suppose you go over it again."

"If Hadow were only here he would do it so much better!" exclaimed Norman in a voice of genuine distress.

"Who is Hadow? and what does he know about it?" inquired the commissioner.

"Hadow is my partner, sir, and he was with me when I found the pay streak," responded Norman.

"Very well, then, bring him here, and let us see if we cannot straighten out the matter," said the commissioner.

"I don't know where he is," groaned Norman. "He left our claim to bring up more tools and provisions. He's disappeared, and I can't find out anything about him."

The searching look returned to the commissioner's face. Norman's whole appearance and manner bore the stamp of truth and sincerity, yet it was all very puzzling.

"Do you know this young man well?" he asked of Porky Brown, who had not yet spoken.

"I do, sir," responded the storekeeper heartily. "He worked for me all last winter, and I never knew a straighter chap. You kin jest bet your life he'll tell no lies. What

may be the name of the party that's got ahead of him, sir, if it's not asking too much?"

"The name is Andrew Smith," the commissioner answered.

"Andy Smith! Andy Smith!" exclaimed Norman, while a cold chill struck to his heart at this untimely reappearance of the scoundrel he had hoped never to see again. "The villain! He must have been following us, and jumped our claim as soon as he got the chance. Oh, my nugget, my nugget! If he takes that I'll shoot him!"

The commissioner was evidently coming to put faith in Norman's story, but wishing to have further corroboration of it, he said in a sympathetic tone:

"Try again to find your partner, and if you are successful, bring him here, and I'll look into the matter further."

There seemed nothing else to be done, and so Norman withdrew with a heavy heart. The sudden and inexplicable change in his fortunes that the jumping of the claim by Andy Smith involved, wrought in him a profound depression that Porky Brown's well-meant efforts at comfort and cheer entirely failed to overcome.

He had entered the commissioner's office believing himself rich for life, and with his mind full of bright plans as to his future, the mysterious non-appearance of his partner being the only cloud upon his happiness.

And now the whole glowing vision had vanished. His gold dust, his nuggets, his claim that held so rich a promise, were now in the possession of another, and that other the very man in all the world whom with good reason he most heartily hated.

Accompanying Brown back to his store, he stayed there the rest of the afternoon in deep dejection, racking his brain with vain conjectures as to what had become of Hadow, and thinking out no less futile schemes for the rescuing of his property from the rascally clutch of Andy Smith.

That night, tossing upon the bed he owed to the storekeeper's hospitality, he determined to go to the diggings he had discovered, and see for himself if Andy Smith were really in possession.

On hearing of this Brown strove hard to dissuade him.

"That low-down skunk, Andy, will put a bullet into you, sure, if he catches sight of you. Wait until Hadow turns up, and then you two

go together. He'll think twice before he tackles the two of you."

But Norman could not endure further uncertainty.

He wanted to know the worst; and, besides, there was in his mind the thought that, even though Smith should have jumped his claim, he might be able to recover his gold, if the scoundrel had not discovered its hiding-place.

So Pay Dirt's grey muzzle was once more pointed away from William's Creek, and he was driven forward so energetically that he could not collect his thoughts sufficiently to indulge in a display of balking.

Back over the trail, now grown familiar, Norman pressed with feverish haste, until he had got within a few miles of his diggings.

Fiercely as his spirit burned within him, he was too wise to reveal his proximity to the usurper of his rights.

Tethering Pay Dirt where the grass was abundant, he saw that rifle and revolver were ready for immediate action, and then set out to approach within range unperceived.

It was not a difficult matter, for the close-set spruce afforded the best of cover, and, being acquainted with the locality, he was able

to make his way to the summit of a hill that completely commanded the diggings.

As he looked down into the little valley, which he had considered so peculiarly the property of himself and his partner, the sight he beheld made his blood boil, and the temptation to use the rifle in his hands came upon him with tremendous strength.

"You miserable scoundrel!" he muttered between his clenched teeth. "It would serve you right if I did put a bullet through your head."

Hardly conscious of what he was doing, he levelled the rifle, and glanced along the sight.

Andy Smith, assisted by a partner as evil-looking as himself, was working away on Norman's claim just near the spot where the first nuggets had been found.

Evidently their labours were being well rewarded, for they were both in high good humour, chaffing one another in their own coarse way, and breaking out into rough guffaws.

The distance was too great for Norman to make out what they said, but they appeared to think it very funny.

The partner dug up the auriferous sand,

while Smith did the washing. He was clever with tools, and had constructed a rude but efficient rocker that did the work far more quickly and thoroughly than the pans Norman and Hadow had been using.

Little did he dream that, as he worked and joked and laughed, grim death was looking upon him from the muzzle of a rifle, and that more than once the forefinger of the boy whose property he was despoiling trembled upon the trigger.

Since he left the ranch Norman had seen sufficient of the rough-and-ready methods of enforcing or regaining one's rights that are always in vogue for a time in a new country, suddenly overrun by an adventurous population, to regard them with a certain amount of respect as affording the only practicable way of securing justice.

But as he lay there in the concealment of the thick bush, with his enemy altogether at his mercy, the impulse to kill passed, and his better nature reasserted itself.

Andy Smith had dealt foully with him, to be sure, but he would not take the law into his own hands notwithstanding.

In some way, he knew not how, he would regain his own, and in the meantime his enemy

must be left to imagine that his nefarious design was a complete success.

Having come to a calmer mood, Norman began to wonder whether his store of gold had come into Smith's hands.

"He may not have found it at all," he said to himself, and his heart leaped at the thought. "That was a good cache I made, and perhaps he's never hit on it. I believe I'll have a try to-night for it."

This decision made, his mind was lightened and he was in a much more cheerful mood.

"I'll go and get something to eat now," he said, "and then cross the river away down and creep up on the other side."

He found Pay Dirt thoroughly enjoying himself; and having watered the animal, tethered it in another spot where the grass had not been cropped.

"Stay there now, old chap, and don't get into any mischief," he said, patting the plump neck; "I may want you in a hurry before I get through here. There's no telling."

Leaving the rifle, but taking his revolver, he struck off down the river bank until he came to a place where a stranded log enabled him to cross without much wading.

"Now I'll have to keep a sharp look-

out," he said, "and not let them get a sight of me."

It was fast drawing towards nightfall, and all that Norman wanted to do until darkness came was to get a clear idea of the exact position of Smith's camp, especially with regard to the spot where the gold had been hidden.

Moving forward with as much caution as if he were stalking deer, he succeeded while it was yet light enough for him to see plainly in getting within a hundred yards of the camp.

The men had but one tent—a shabby, weather-worn affair that must have been poor protection in a heavy downpour.

This stood a little above the diggings, and Norman's heart grew chill as he studied its situation, for, as far as he could make out from where he lay, it was pitched either right over his cache, or very close beside it.

"Confound the rascals!" he muttered angrily, while again the impulse to wreak revenge upon them stirred within him. "I don't believe I can get my gold."

The thought of that splendid nugget, which he had cleaned and polished until it flashed in the sun, being in the hands of the men he considered the vilest in the world was

maddening, and he determined to stay where he was until the gold-diggers had settled down for the night, and then make a desperate try for his treasure.

The two men worked until dark, and then loitered over their supper so long that Norman's patience was well-nigh exhausted.

But at last they finished their pipes and their talk, and turned in, to fall asleep as soon as they had rolled up in their blankets.

Now was Norman's opportunity. The moon had risen while he waited, illuminating the valley, except where the shadows lay darkly, and he could pick his way without difficulty.

As he neared the tent he could hear the two men snoring inside, and this gave him confidence.

Moving steadily forward, he reached the bit of turf under which he had hidden his gold. With trembling fingers he felt it eagerly, and could hardly restrain a cry of joy at finding it undisturbed.

"I'll have it up," he murmured. "They shan't get my nuggets, any way."

He moved forward a step to begin operations, and, the shadow being very heavy, did



"CAUGHT HIS FOOT AND SENT HIM VIOLENTLY INTO THE CANVAS."

not notice a tent-rope, which caught his foot and sent him violently into the canvas.

Instantly there came from inside the tent a startled groan, followed quickly by the ominous click of a revolver, and a furious shout of:

“Who in thunder are you?”

CHAPTER XVI.

DOWN IN THE DEPTHS.

RECOVERING himself with that agility which was one of his happy characteristics, Norman darted away from the tent, and had vanished in the bush ere Andy Smith, his small sharp eyes blinking confusedly, reached the open air, and the latter could see nothing to account for the disturbance of his slumbers.

Holding the revolver before him so as to be ready to level it on the instant, he peered this way and that, meantime pouring forth a flood of oaths horrible enough to taint the whole atmosphere.

Norman, safely hid in the bush, could not help laughing a little, despite his disappointment. Smith's rage seemed so futile, and, standing as he was in front of his tent in the full glare of the moonlight, he presented so plain a mark, had the nocturnal intruder wished

to shoot him, that he even felt a sort of pity for him.

"I could finish you off dead easy, if I liked," he said to himself; "and it would serve you right if I did, too."

By this time Smith's partner had joined him at the tent-door, and they engaged in an earnest discussion with reference to what it was that had disturbed them, finally reaching the conclusion that one of their mules must have strayed from the pasture and stumbled over the tent-rope; and then, having thus relieved their minds, they went back to their blankets.

Realising that there was no chance of accomplishing his object, Norman made his way down the river again in a very dejected frame of mind.

"It's no good," he murmured despondently. "These villains have got everything their own way. Oh, if I could only find Hadow! What can have become of him? He must be dead, surely."

And sorrow for his partner drove all thought of his own loss from his mind for a time.

He did not halt until he got back to where Pay Dirt was philosophically enjoying himself, and then, rolling up in his blankets, he managed to sleep soundly until morning.

There now seemed nothing to do but to return to William's Creek. Accordingly, he set out as soon as he had breakfasted.

"Hadow may have turned up by this time," he said to himself, striving to extract comfort from the possibility; "and if he has, then surely the commissioner will believe the two of us, and give us our rights."

He did not mind Pay Dirt's deliberate pace now, for he regarded his cause as practically lost, and it did not seem of any consequence if he were a day longer in returning to the settlement than was absolutely necessary.

It was his fourth trip over the trail, and every boulder and tree had grown familiar to him. Once he had thought it the pathway to fortune. Now it seemed the road to disappointment and despair.

"I guess it's no use," he sadly soliloquised. "I'm not one of the lucky ones. I might as well make up my mind to that, and get back home as best I can."

Such was the tenor of his thoughts as he plodded along in front of Pay Dirt, who followed as steadily as a dog.

Ere he had traversed one-half the distance between his claim and William's Creek, there fell upon him one of those tremendous rain-

storms for which that part of the country could hardly be surpassed.

The very flood-gates of heaven seemed to be opened, and in a wonderfully short space of time the trail became utterly impassable.

Norman was fain to take refuge among the mountains, where, in an elevated nook, he awaited the return of more auspicious weather.

Unable to light a fire, and everything belonging to him—clothes, blankets, and provisions—being drenched, he had a very miserable time of it, so that when the clouds had finally emptied themselves, and the sun shone once more with warmth and splendour, he resumed his solitary journey with quickened speed, being resolved to reach William's Creek within twenty-four hours, if he could possibly manage it.

The deluge of rain compelled him to seek a path along the heights, where it was necessary to proceed with constant care, lest the narrow ledge should crumble away beneath his feet, or the steep, gravel-strewn slope start moving beneath him.

Pay Dirt was a rare mountaineer. There was nothing not actually requiring the use of hands as well as feet that he could not manage,

and he kept on behind his young master as steadily as if endowed with human intelligence.

Indeed, his company was of great consequence to Norman, who otherwise would have found the loneliness of his situation well-nigh intolerable.

Despite the difficulties of the route, they were making very fair progress, and the prospects of getting to the end of the journey by the time Norman had fixed in his mind seemed quite good, when they came to a long slope that reached half-way up the mountain-side from a deep, dark gorge, through which foamed a furious torrent.

"That's a nasty-looking bit, old chap," said Norman to his long-eared companion, as he surveyed the slope with a critical eye. "If the stuff starts moving while we're crossing it, we'll stand a mighty good chance of having a coast down that'll land us in the next kingdom."

Pay Dirt offered no suggestions while his master studied the situation in the hope of discovering a less dangerous route.

But there was nothing of the kind to be descried, the only alternative apparently being to go back and make a long circuit.

This, however, Norman felt very reluctant to do. He was impatient to get to William's

Creek. His scanty stock of provisions had become almost uneatable, and his ammunition having been soaked by rain he could not shoot any game.

So after a little hesitation he decided to brave the passage of the slope.

He had not advanced far when he realised that the danger was even greater than he expected, and he would have been glad to retrace his steps had that been possible.

But right behind came Pay Dirt, putting one foot down after the other with the delicacy and precision peculiar to its kind.

To make the slow-witted if surefooted creature reverse and return to solid ground was, as Norman well knew, impracticable unless he led the way.

This, however, he could not do without going around the mule, and he dared not attempt that, lest their double weight on the same spot should precipitate an avalanche.

To forge ahead and trust to Providence seemed the only thing, and so, stepping as quickly as the treacherous nature of the stuff underneath him permitted, he hurried along with his heart in his mouth.

Every time he put down his foot the shattered shale gave a little, and as he reached

the middle of the slope this downward movement increased.

If the miserable material should once start moving it would not stop until it had swept him and the mule away to inevitable death.

Two-thirds of the distance had been accomplished without mishap, and Norman was beginning to breathe more easily, when his left foot went in above the ankle, and in the effort of extricating it the other sank still deeper.

"Heaven save me!" he cried, seized with a sudden panic-terror. "I must make a break for the other side, or it'll all be over with me."

And then, throwing aside all caution, he plunged ahead recklessly, lifting his feet as though he were walking on eggs, and putting as little weight upon them as possible.

Pay Dirt made no attempt to follow his example, but kept on stolidly at the same slow pace.

The end of the slope drew near, and in spite of several small slides the face of it had not moved materially.

Twenty yards more and the solid rock would be within reach.

Just then Norman felt the stuff beneath

him moving, not very rapidly, but resistlessly, and he made a frenzied effort to work uphill.

But the avalanche had begun, and already had him at its mercy. Struggle as he might, he could make no upward gain.

Wider and swifter grew the moving mass, until the whole face of the slope seemed to be affected, and in absolute helplessness both Norman and Pay Dirt went downward with quickly accelerating speed.

On towards the dark gorge they slid, both finding great difficulty in maintaining an upright position, yet managing it in some wonderful fashion.

Some distance below Norman, and to his right, there projected into the shale a shoulder of rock that offered a chance of escape if it only could be reached.

By desperate struggling, Norman could make some little progress towards this rock, but it was not much, and the chances seemed that the avalanche would sweep him past ere he could lay hold of it.

But he was not one to take anything for granted, or to give up the fight for life until the last possible effort had been made.

Thrusting himself desperately forward, he

gathered all his strength into one supreme attempt to reach the rock.

His feet sank deeper and deeper into the abominable stuff, and the dust rose up in blinding, choking clouds ; yet he struggled on doggedly, scarce able to see the goal for which he was making.

When not more than twenty yards above the rock he was still ten yards away from it, and as he looked anxiously across this intervening space it seemed hardly possible that he could traverse it in time.

Yet yard by yard he fought his way, and at last with one tremendous effort flung himself forward, arms outstretched to their utmost, and face buried in the sliding shale.

His hands just reached the rock, and his nails, happily finding their way into a cleft, held there so firmly that although his body was swept downward until his arms were well-nigh wrenched from their sockets, his desperate grip was not loosened, and presently he was able to regain his feet, and crawl up the rock out of the power of the avalanche.

Here, in a condition closely bordering on collapse, he remained for some moments, hardly conscious of anything beyond the fact that he had escaped.

Then the thought of his mule flashed into his mind, and exclaiming, "Pay Dirt! What's become of him?" he peered through the dust in anxious search for the animal.

But the faithful creature had utterly vanished, having been swept by the avalanche into the gorge, to be dashed to death against the great boulders by the pitiless torrent.

Hoping against hope, Norman waited until all motion upon the slope had ceased, and the dust had cleared from the air.

Then he realised that it was all over with his humble companion, and that he had not only lost him but everything else in the world he owned, for Pay Dirt had carried on his back, besides the provisions and blankets, his spare clothing, his ammunition, and his rifle, so that the revolver in his belt represented the entire sum of his worldly possessions.

Here now was a blow that indeed seemed too heavy to be borne, and in the depth of his despair Norman felt as though he might as well fling himself down the slope after the mule and thus bring his misfortunes to an end.

But in a few minutes saner counsels asserted themselves, and presently he sprang to his feet, and, lifting his clenched fists to the sun blazing upon him unpityingly, he cried:

"No—I won't give up. I'm not beaten. God helping me I'll make another effort, and see if I can't have better luck yet."

From the rock whereby his life was saved a ridge ran to the mountain-side, and making his way along this Norman was free to continue his journey.

He calculated that it must still take him about twenty hours of travel to reach William's Creek, and he resolved to push forward as rapidly as his strength would permit.

Warned by his thrilling escape on the slope, he avoided all such places, preferring to make a *détour* or to clamber along the ledges of the cliffs.

Not having had a proper meal since starting out from the settlement—for he was at best a very poor cook, and when Hadow was with him the Englishman had done all the culinary work—he was in poor condition to stand doing without food altogether, and he found his strength slipping away from him at an ominous rate.

The catastrophe that had so nearly involved him gave him an idea as to Hadow's fate that took full possession of his mind.

"It was something like that which happened to him," he soliloquised sadly; "and unless

I chance upon somebody who'll give me a lift, I'm not likely to see William's Creek again ;" and then, after a mournful pause, he added, "Andy Smith'll have our claims all to himself."

But as he murmured these words his spirit blazed up at the infamy and rank injustice of such a result of his quest for gold, and, throwing off the deadening cloud of despair, he exclaimed :

"No ! he won't ! he won't have them ! He never shall ! He'll get the worst of it yet !"

Summoning up fresh energy, he struggled on throughout the remainder of the day, slept that night in a moss-lined nook at the foot of a cliff, made shift for breakfast with a handful of berries and a drink of spring-water, and then set off again, determined not to halt until he was within sight of William's Creek.

How he got through that terrible day he had no distinct recollection. It afterwards seemed more like some dreadful dream than an actual experience. Hour after hour he plodded on, often stumbling from very weakness, but picking himself up again and staggering forward, his mind concentrated upon the one thought and purpose—to reach some human dwelling ere nightfall.

Late in the afternoon, after infinite toil, he came out upon the highest ridge of the range of hills encircling the diggings at William's Creek ; and the welcome sight of his fellows, looking very much like clay-coloured ants as they worked away on their claims, filled his heart with joy and thrilled him with hope.

True it was that fortune had hitherto dealt very hardly with him, yet youth and strength were still on his side, and he would take courage for another wrestle with the fickle goddess.

Half-way down the mountain-side he halted, and sat himself upon a stump.

"I won't go into the town until dark," he murmured. "I'd rather nobody should see me like this. I know Porky Brown will be good to me, and will trust me for whatever I need to make myself look respectable again."

Resting his face upon his hands, he gave himself up to mournful reverie, and became so lost to everything else that he did not observe the approach of a tall, handsome man, verging on middle age, whose dress and bearing at once distinguished him from the residents of William's Creek.

Touching Norman upon the shoulder, the

stranger said in an authoritative and yet kindly tone :

“ You seem to be in trouble, my lad, if I may judge from appearances. What is the matter ? ”

Lifting his head, Norman found regarding him with a kind of amused interest the most distinguished and impressive personage he had ever seen, and such a sense of awe came over him that he could not at once frame a response to the inquiry.

Rightly divining the reason for the boy's hesitation, and being somewhat touched by the haggard yet prepossessing countenance upturned to him, the gentleman, extending his hand, said with a smile of encouragement :

“ Tell me who you are, and whence you've come, for your looks seem to say, ‘ Hereby hangs a tale. ’ ”

There was something in the voice and the whole appearance of the man that not only commanded Norman's confidence, but inspired in him, he knew not why, the feeling that here was one who would believe in him, and perhaps help him.

Rising to his feet he pulled off his cap, and answered in an eager yet respectful tone :

“ My name is Norman Thompson, sir, and

I came from Walla Walla, and I'll be so glad to tell you about myself if you don't mind listening to me."

"Not at all, my boy, not at all," was the brisk assurance. "We'll just walk along towards the town, and you'll tell me your story. The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, remember now," he added, flashing a keen glance at Norman from his deep-set, piercing eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FRIEND IN HIGH QUARTERS.

IN a simple, straightforward manner Norman told his story to the tall gentleman, who listened with profound attention, occasionally interposing a question where the matter was not perfectly clear to him.

When the tale was finished the listener was silent for a moment, and then said in a slow, deliberate way that conveyed the idea both of purpose and of power to act :

"Your story is a remarkable one, and I am very much impressed by it. But before committing myself to do anything in your behalf, I must inquire further. Is there any one in the town by whom you are well known?"

"Why, yes, sir," cried Norman eagerly. "There's Porky—I mean Mr. Brown, who keeps the store. I worked for him all last

winter, and he knows a great deal about me."

"I think I know the man," said the gentleman—"a decent, responsible tradesman. I'll take an early opportunity of seeing him. And now," he continued, "you'll come with me where I'm staying. You are evidently much in need of a good meal, and of facilities for improving your appearance."

Marvelling who this new-found friend might be, but too much filled with awe to inquire, Norman accompanied him to the only tolerable pretence of a hotel that William's Creek could then boast.

It was dark when they reached it, and as they entered the front room, which served as office, smoking-room, and parlour, Norman got some clue to the identity of his benefactor through the respectful salutations which greeted him, every one, from the hotel proprietor down to the bar-room loafer, showing anxiety to have his notice, and being careful to address him as "Judge."

Acknowledging the salutations with a fine blending of graciousness and dignity, the "Judge," bidding Norman follow him, went up to his own room.

"Now, my boy," said he, "there's water,

soap, and towels. You'll enjoy a good wash, I know ; and then we'll go down to supper."

Greatly refreshed by his ablutions, which he keenly appreciated, for he was naturally neat in his ways, Norman needed no sauce save his own hunger for the plain yet bountiful and well-cooked meal that followed.

He could not help observing that he was the object of much curiosity on the part of the other guests of the establishment. But this did not bother him in the least. He had perfect confidence in the one who stood sponsor for him, and felt entirely indifferent to inquiring looks or whispered counsellings.

By this time he had come to know that he was in the care of no less a personage than the renowned Judge Begbie, whose stern, fearless, impartial administration of justice had made him the best known and most deeply respected man in the whole province ; and the hope that he had been cherishing ever since he was accosted on the hillside grew into a settled conviction that through the famous judge he would yet be restored to his own.

After supper they went over to Porky Brown's store, where the reception given

Norman by the proprietor went far to strengthen Judge Begbie's faith in him and his story.

Taking Mr. Brown aside, the judge questioned him closely about Norman, and was thoroughly satisfied with the replies he received.

When they left the store he laid his hand in a kindly fashion upon the boy's shoulder, saying :

"I may tell you, Norman, that I am now fully convinced of the truth of what you have told me, and I shall make it my business to obtain redress for you. But you must exercise patience, for the business promises to be somewhat difficult, and it will not do to proceed hastily."

The tears of joy and gratitude overflowed Norman's eyes, and his voice trembled so that he was scarce intelligible as he strove to thank the judge for thus promising to be his champion.

But he was stopped midway.

"Tut, tut! Never mind that," he was told. "It is my business to care for the interests of justice, and that is all I propose to do in your case. The first thing in the morning you will go with me to the Gold Com-

missioner's office, and we will see what can be learned there."

At the Gold Commissioner's Judge Begbie inquired minutely into the facts attending the granting of Andy Smith's licence, and took careful notes of the dates and other details, comparing them with Norman's account, until the whole matter was thoroughly clear in his mind.

"Now," he said to Norman when the examination was completed, "you must possess your soul in patience until I can give further attention to this affair, which will be in the course of a couple of days, as I have some matters on hand that must first be disposed of."

Porky Brown in his hearty way had invited Norman to stay with him, and had offered to meet all his present needs, of which generous treatment Norman thankfully availed himself.

"I'll make it all right with you some day, as sure as I live," he said, after expressing his gratitude.

"Of course you will, my son, of course you will. I'm not afraid to risk anything on that," was the worthy storekeeper's cheery response. "Judge Begbie'll get you back

your own, never fear, and that low-down villain of an Andy Smith'll be sorry he ever jumped your claim."

While roaming about the diggings passing away the time that hung heavily upon his hands, Norman one day saw coming up the road a small party of men headed by a figure that seemed strangely familiar.

"That looks like Maclellan! Can it be he?" he exclaimed, his heart thrilling with joy at the prospect of meeting his big friend again.

Hastening onward, his doubts soon gave place to certainty, for Maclellan it was, looking if possible bigger and browner than ever.

His quick eye recognised Norman while the latter was still a good way off, and his deep, rich voice rolled out a hearty:

"Hullo, Normie! Where on earth did you come from?" and, quickening his pace, he came up with outstretched hand, which Norman grasped delightedly.

They both began to ask questions, but Maclellan soon overbore Norman, and the latter was presently in the thick of an account of all that had happened to him since they had parted company.

When it came to the recital of Andy Smith's villainy Maclellan waxed very warm, and with many a robust epithet vowed that he would not rest until he had got rid of the scoundrel, even though he had to shoot him. He was very glad to hear of Judge Begbie being interested in the matter.

"He's the straightest man in the whole country," he exclaimed emphatically, "and whatever he says, goes; you can bet your pile on that."

Not until he had heard the whole of Norman's story would he tell anything about himself, and then it appeared that he had nothing save a succession of disappointments to relate.

In spite of strenuous effort and an unsparing expenditure of his resources, he was still far from having made a good "strike."

Indeed, he had pretty well reached the end of his tether as regards finances, and was quite resolved, if fortune did not treat him more kindly in this last venture into the Cariboo region, to give up gold-hunting and return to his own country.

On hearing this Norman exclaimed:

"No, you won't go back. Just wait until Andy Smith's kicked out, and then you can

have poor Hadow's claim, or if he turns up (although I'm about certain he must be dead), you can stake out one for yourself. There's lots of gold at our creek ; I'm dead sure of that."

Maclellan smiled at his generous impetuosity.

"I guess I won't take your partner's claim. It's properly yours if he doesn't show up. But from what you've been letting out about the creek, I think I'll go up there with you and see if there's anything good left."

"Hurrah!" shouted Norman, waving his cap exultantly. "That'll be great! Won't Andy Smith look queer when he sees us coming on him together?"

Judge Begbie was already acquainted with Maclellan—they having met in another part of the country—and expressed pleasure at the latter's intention of going up to Norman's diggings.

"It may prove very convenient to have one of your bone and sinew with us," he said, with an approving glance at Maclellan's splendid proportions. "Those rascals may take the notion of acting ugly."

They set out on the following day, the party comprising six altogether, Judge Begbie having with him a couple of men who looked

after himself and his things, and could act as special constables if need be.

They were all well armed and well mounted, besides having four mules laden with provisions and camp equipage, so that they made quite an imposing cavalcade as they rode out of the settlement.

Finer weather than that which favoured them could not be wished, and they were all in excellent spirits, for the affair promised to be full of interest to everybody.

They had made about half the distance when Maclellan, who was fond of ranging ahead, in order to pick out the best possible route, saw a small party of Indians making their way towards the trail from a deep valley on the right.

Thinking that perhaps something might be learned from them that would be of advantage, he halted and hailed them.

To his surprise there came a response, not in the scarce intelligible dialect of the natives, but in good, clear English, and, on a closer inspection of the party, he saw that one member of it was a white man, although so strange and shabby in appearance as to look much like his companions.

Advancing a little, Maclellan asked :

"Where do you come from, partner? and how's luck with you?"

It was not the voice of a rough miner, but of a man of birth and breeding, that responded in a sad tone:

"I come from the Valley of Death, and the luck has been all against me." Then with a look whose intense eagerness made it full of pathos, he inquired: "Do you know anything of Norman Thompson?"

In an instant Maclellan understood who the gentleman in rags really was, and exclaiming joyously, "Why, you must be Hadow!" he grasped the bewildered man's hand as he went on—"Norman Thompson? I reckon I do know him. There he is, coming up the trail," and he pointed down the valley to where the others of the party were just coming into sight.

The meeting between the two friends and partners was so touching that even Judge Begbie's stern grey eyes shone suspiciously as he watched it, with a kindly smile softening the firm-set lips.

Norman felt as if Hadow were restored to him from the dead, and to Hadow it seemed as if he had come out of the grave to life and hope again.

His story was listened to with sympathetic attention by the whole party, for Norman had spoken so much of him that they were all deeply interested.

It seemed that when he set out for William's Creek to record the claims and secure licences he had attempted to save time and travel by taking what he conceived to be a short cut through the forest.

In so doing he had completely lost his way, and, while endeavouring to find it again, had fallen from a crumbling ledge into a rocky gulch, where he lay bleeding and insensible, until fortunately happened upon by two Indian hunters, who staunched his wounds and bore him off to their camp, which was not far distant. Here he had lain for some days, hovering between life and death, and then for a fortnight thereafter slowly recovering strength, until at last he was able to be on the move again, when the kind Indians set out with him for William's Creek.

He had lost everything save the clothes on his back, and these were sadly the worse for wear, so that he would have been little better than a human scarecrow were it not for the refinement of feature and grace of manner that at once proclaimed his true character.

Judge Begbie praised the Indians for their care of Hadow, and directed his men to give them some tea and tobacco and ammunition from his stores, adding thereto an order which he told them to take to Brown's store, where they would be given what they wanted up to a certain amount.

"There's nothing like properly rewarding those fellows when they act like Christians. It encourages them to do it again," he said in his impressive way.

The red men seemed to fully appreciate the gifts, and departed with their tawny features wreathed in smiles.

By the close of another day the party had drawn near to what was known among them as Norman's Creek, and, having crossed the river a couple of miles below it, they reached the spot when Andy Smith and his partner were about knocking off work for the day.

When Andy saw them approaching, Norman being slightly in advance and Maclellan just behind, while Judge Begbie and Hadow followed close, he was manifestly much startled, and growled something to his partner that was not audible to the others.

But quickly recovering his self-possession

he glared at the newcomers as if he would by his looks warn them off the place, and, resting his hands on his shovel, said in his gruffest tone :

“What do you want here? There’s better places to camp farther down the river.”

“We want our claims,” responded Norman, while Maclellan regarded the two rascals with a stern smile that boded them no good. “You’ve jumped them, you villains!”

The evil, murderous expression that distorted Smith’s face told plainly enough how it would have gone with Norman had he been alone when he spoke thus.

But with two such supporters as the stalwart judge and the still more mighty Maclellan, Norman had nothing to fear, and so confident did he feel of establishing the right of himself and Hadow to the diggings that he could afford to wear an easy smile, and to stand his ground firmly, in spite of the usurper’s menacing scowls.

Before Smith could reply to Norman’s accusation the judge moved forward, and said in a quiet tone, that somehow sent a chill to Smith’s backbone :

“I am Judge Begbie, and I have come

here at the instance of this young man to inquire into your title to these claims, which he alleges to be rightly his. Immediately after supper we will take the matter up."

Smith's countenance as he heard this announcement was a study.

At first he grew ghastly pale, and seemed about to give way without any show of fight.

Then the natural hardihood of the scoundrel reasserted itself, and, pulling himself together, he stared defiantly into Judge Begbie's face, as he growled rather than said with a running accompaniment of oaths :

"Fire ahead! What do I care? I've got my licence all right, and ye can't interfere with me."

While the judge's men unpacked the camp things and got ready the evening meal, Maclellan constituted himself sentinel in charge over Smith's camp, and his eagle-like eyes detecting the partner in the act of slipping into the woods with something in his hands, he at once covered him with his revolver and ordered him to wait.

"Just bring that here, will you?" he said in that deep, compelling tone which no one who ever heard it mistook

Trembling with terror, for the big revolver pointed straight at his head, the man shambled back, and let drop a bag that Maclellan bid Norman pick up.

The excessive weight at once proclaimed its contents. Indeed, it contained all the gold found by the two men during their working of the diggings.

"Ah! I guessed as much," remarked Maclellan, lifting the precious bag and looking very well pleased with himself. "The judge will settle presently whose gold this is."

Andy Smith, when he saw what was taking place, turned livid with rage, and put his hand to his hip; but Maclellan, quickly bringing his revolver to bear upon him, drawled out in a most exasperating fashion:

"Go easy, Andy. I've got the call now. It's not your turn to play yet."

Whereupon, with a wolfish snarl, Smith resumed his occupation of frying rusty bacon.

As soon as supper was over, and the inevitable pipes smoked, Judge Begbie announced that he was ready to hold his court of inquiry and adjudication.

The judge seated himself near the tent, the others ranging themselves around him.

By the light of a blazing pile of tree-trunks this curious impromptu trial began in the oldest and noblest of all court-houses, having the star-studded canopy of heaven for a dome and the everlasting hills as encircling walls.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ALL’S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.”

JUDGE BEGBIE first called upon Norman to give his statement in the matter at issue, which he did in a clear, straightforward style that could not have failed to make a deep impression upon a jury, had there been one impanelled.

“Have you any other evidence than your own assertions?” asked the judge when the lad had reached the end of his recital.

“Yes, I have,” replied Norman. “If those fellows haven’t found my cache, I can show the big nugget and the rest of the gold we took out when we were working here.”

Smith so started at this that Norman felt sure the hidden treasure had been discovered by him.

“Show us where you made your cache,” said the judge.

They arose in a body and went to Smith's tent, and by the light of blazing brands Norman, seizing a spade, nervously attacked the turf. If the big nugget were gone it would take a great many smaller ones to compensate him for its loss.

The others watched him with breathless interest while he dug.

Presently he gave a cry of joy inexpressible, and falling on his knees plunged his hand into the yielding earth, whence the next moment he drew forth a very much discoloured canvas bag that he felt with trembling fingers, and then waved triumphantly above his head, shouting :

"Hurrah! Hurrah! It's all here! It's all here! Look, Hadow, look!" and he tossed the bag to his partner.

There was something very like a cheer from the little group of men gathered about Hadow, and their faces showed how they shared in Norman's joy as they passed the heavy bag from one to the other, while Smith and his companion in wrong looked correspondingly glum and chagrined, the fact being that they had never suspected the existence of so precious a find right under their feet, so to speak.

"You've certainly made out a very good

case, Norman," said Judge Begbie when the excitement had subsided, and they had returned to the firelight. "Let us now hear what Mr. Hadow has to say."

Hadow, of course, corroborated Norman's story in every particular, and when he had finished, the judge called upon Andy Smith to make his statement.

With amazing effrontery the wily villain poured forth a specious story that, in the absence of any contravening evidence, was well calculated to deceive the cleverest judge.

According to him, he and his partner, while out prospecting, had come upon this creek, and had noticed evidences of work there, but as the place was entirely deserted, and there were no signs of claims being staked out, they had naturally presumed that the diggings were abandoned.

Determining to try their luck a little, however, they had gone to work on their own account, with such promising results that they thought it worth while taking out a licence, which was duly granted them.

"And you are quite sure that there were no claims staked out ahead of you?" Judge Begbie asked, fixing his keen grey eyes sternly upon Smith.

Avoiding the penetrating glance, but speaking in a tone of entire assurance, Smith replied :

"Nothing of the kind, Judge. There weren't no stakes on the spot anywhere. Ask my partner if there was."

"Very good," responded Judge Begbie. "Where is your partner? I will hear him too."

Smith looked around. His partner was not in sight. He called his name. There was no response. He repeated the call with the addition of sundry sulphurous epithets. Still no response.

He then rushed furiously towards his tent, shouting in so frantic a fashion that even the judge's gravity was disturbed, while Maclellan roared out laughing, and said :

"I reckon he's wasting his breath. That coyote's vamoosed, as sure's you live."

Which indeed proved to be the case, for the rascal, who was just a mere tool of Smith's, fearing the consequences of Judge Begbie's investigation, had taken to the woods, and nothing more was seen of him.

Lest Andy Smith should follow his example Judge Begbie bade his men keep a close watch upon his movements, and when he returned from his fruitless search for his

partner the judge again put to him the question with regard to the stakes.

On Smith reiterating his denial the judge looked at Hadow, who, stepping forward, handed him a half-charred piece of wood that bore the marks of axe and knife.

"There was nothing of this kind in the ground, you are quite sure?" the judge demanded in his sternest tone as he turned the piece of wood towards the light, and pointed to a smooth place upon it, where the initials "N. T." and "W. H.," and the date "June 15, 1860," could still be deciphered.

The instant Smith saw the stake the remarkable assurance he had hitherto maintained fell from him like a dropped mask. He realised his game was up, and with a smothered curse made a break for the bush.

But Maclellan had anticipated some such action, and deftly throwing out his foot he brought Smith headlong to the ground, and promptly sat upon him.

The offence of claim-jumping was very seriously regarded in British Columbia, and no one meted out sterner justice to those guilty of it than Judge Begbie.

Maclellan was well aware of this, and, having a good score to settle with Smith apart from

his rascality to Norman, he had no idea of allowing him to escape even with the forfeiture of all the gold he and his partner had washed out during their working of the claim.

"Bring me some stout cord, quick!" Maclellan called out as he held his struggling captive pinned to the ground.

Norman immediately brought him a good long bit of packing-cord, with which Smith's hands were tied behind his back and his feet securely hobbled.

"There, now, you hound, I've got ye just where I want ye! Ye can listen to what the judge has to say to you."

Judge Begbie, who had been watching this exciting episode with an expression of amused approval, now proceeded to pronounce judgment with characteristic brevity.

"Andy Smith, the case against you has been clearly proven. I find you guilty of claim-jumping, and I sentence you to five years in the chain-gang."

Smith received his sentence in grim silence. He well knew that once Judge Begbie's decision was given there need be no hope cherished of either alteration or appeal. It stood as the law of the Medes and Persians.

"And now the court is adjourned *sine die*," added the judge.

Then, turning to Norman and Hadow, he said pleasantly :

"Gentlemen, you can resume possession of your property."

Holding his hat at arm's length, Hadow called out :

"Three cheers for Judge Begbie, the best man in British Columbia."

And when these had been heartily given, accompanied by vigorous waving of hats, he further suggested "God Save the Queen," in which no one joined to better purpose than the judge himself, the strains of the National Anthem pouring forth into the still night air and echoing back from the astonished hills.

Midnight had passed ere quiet came over the camp. The incidents of the day had been so dramatic and exciting, and there were so many things to be rehearsed and so much to be discussed with regard to the future.

Norman's big nugget was passed from hand to hand and duly admired. Maclellan pronounced it the largest he had ever seen, and estimated its value at not less than a thousand dollars.

Norman eagerly besought Judge Begbie to

accept it, urging that *he* really did not need it, as his fortune was already made, and it would give him such pleasure to see the nugget in the hands of the man who had restored to him his rights.

But the judge would not listen to such a proposition.

"No, no, my boy," he said firmly yet kindly, putting his hand upon Norman's shoulder. "I was your judge, not your advocate in this matter;" and then, observing Norman flush, he hastened to add: "But I assure you I fully appreciate your generous offer, understanding the spirit in which it is made."

Norman then wanted Maclellan to accept the nugget as a token of gratitude for his kindness, but the big fellow laughed outright at the idea, saying:

"Not if I know myself. I'm not built that way, Normie. I'll stake out a claim for myself right alongside yours, and that will be good enough for me."

And so Norman was fain to retain his prize, and he then determined to keep it intact until he could exhibit it to the dear ones on the ranch.

On the following morning Judge Begbie

went back to William's Creek, taking Andy Smith with him.

Norman accompanied him in order to attend to the proper registration of his own and Hadow's claims, and likewise of Maclellan's, who remained with Hadow to hold the fort until Norman should return, bringing supplies, mining tools, and a number of men to work in the diggings, which would then be conducted on a much larger scale.

In due time all this was successfully accomplished, and such good results were achieved by the three friends that the fame of Norman's Creek rapidly spread, and ere the end of the summer hundreds of miners were hard at work there.

But while a number did fairly well, the three original claims remained the richest, and when autumn came Norman found himself possessed of more wealth than he had ever ventured to conceive possible.

"I think I've had enough of this for the present," he announced one evening as the three friends sat chatting together. "I don't mind owning up to feeling homesick, and I'm going to quit soon, and make tracks for the ranch."

"And I too," chimed in Hadow, who was

dreamily puffing at his pipe. "I'm already richer than I ever imagined I'd be, and I'm fairly pining for dear old England. What do you say to selling out here? We'll have no difficulty in finding purchasers."

"I reckon not," said Maclellan, "for the man that's willing to buy is right here if you're in earnest about selling."

When people have such regard for and confidence in one another as had these three friends, there need be no difficulty in arriving at equitable terms even for good paying gold claims, and before they turned in that night the whole thing was satisfactorily settled, and Maclellan became sole owner of the property.

A few weeks later Norman and Hadow took their departure, feeling sorry to part with Maclellan, yet rejoicing in the fact that their faces were turned towards home.

They travelled together to Victoria, where they came upon Andy Smith in the chain-gang working in the streets. Here they parted company, Hadow taking steamer for San Francisco, while Norman went down the Sound, and thence to Walla Walla.

The sensation created by his return with an independent fortune may be readily imagined. His mother thought little of the gold—not

even the famous nugget aroused her enthusiasm. She was too lost in gratitude at the safe return of her son, taller, stronger, handsomer, and more of a man in every way than he had left her.

But the other members of the family and the neighbours round about fully appreciated the importance of Norman's achievement, and he was flattered and fêted until he ran serious risk of having his head turned.

His one experience of gold-hunting, successful as it had been, sufficed for him.

He preferred henceforth the more ordinary pursuit of ranching, and, having apportioned one-fourth of his fortune among the family, he invested a good part of the remainder in wide-spreading ranges of land and great herds of horses and cattle, in the management of which he found both congenial occupation and increasing profit.

THE END.

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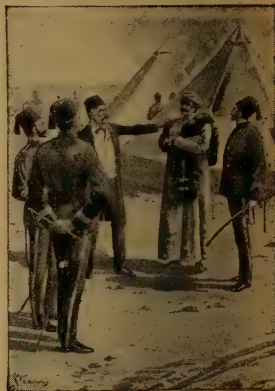
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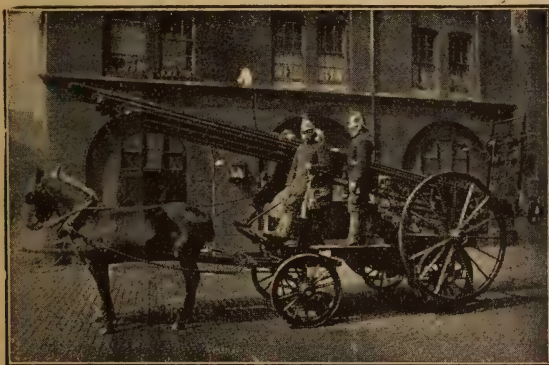
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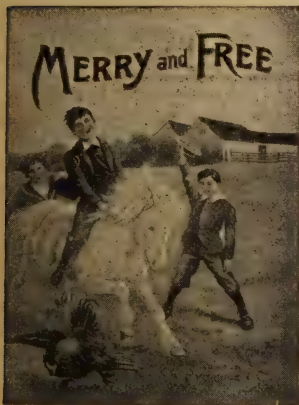
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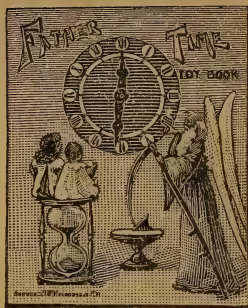
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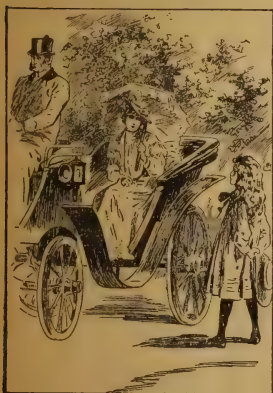
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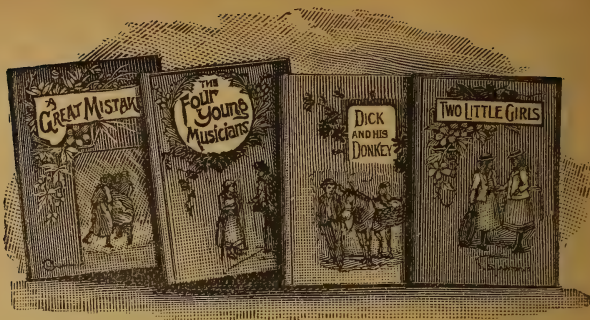
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